

POTKM Volume 5: Of Monsters and Meta Humans

By: AndrewK9000

Our heroes arrive on the world of Monster High and become involved in a diabolical conspiracy to steal The Necronomicon. Sora and his group team up with The Bureau, while Kairi meets and makes friends with Frankie Stein and her fellow Monsters. Both groups converge to battle an insidious cabal, but just who is the real enemy?

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One Door Closes Another Opens

Greetings fellow readers and writers! This is the fifth volume of Path of The Keyblade Master and I hope you like it! Okay, last time around Sora and the gang had finally gotten to Hogwarts. They learned a lot about magic, made a lot of friends, solved a thousand-year mystery and saved the world from being wiped clean of all life. But now things change as they've been forced to travel to a parallel Earth, one vastly different from the one they just left.

This time around we're crossing with Monster High, a franchise I became interested in last October. I know what you're thinking; Monster High is for girls, well, so is Winx Club, W.I.T.C.H. and My Little Pony Friendship is Magic. Well, I like all of it and Monster High is no exception. This is a story I want to write and I intend to enjoy writing it, just as I enjoy writing all my stories. I only hope that you enjoy reading it as much. However, there's bound to be those persons out there whom are bound to have nothing but negative things to say, some because they simply don't like the story, others because they have nothing better to do than spout flames about other people's stories, just for the sake of hating. Well, if you don't like the story, don't read it. Just so long as you remember... THIS IS FANFICTION!

Now, I don't own Monster High or any of the other little stuff I've thrown into this fic. There's also some Harry Potter, a bit of Winx and a lot of other stuff just for flavor. I do own The Ramblers and all their different versions, so please don't sue me, I'm just trying to write a good story. And now, without further delay, please enjoy...

Kingdom Hearts: Path of the Keyblade Master

Volume 5: Of Monsters and Meta Humans

By AndrewK9000

Chapter 1: One Door Closes, Another Opens

"Okay, let's take a step back and think this out," said Tess, "what happened?"

"Well," said Malcolm, "let's see... We stopped a conspiracy from wiping out all life on the last world we were on, while also removing specific memories of that conspiracy. But then we wound up chasing after a koozed-out Kairi through a rift and wound up on a parallel world, where a friend of ours doesn't know us and now..." he then held up his handcuffed wrists, "and now we've been arrested! Does that clarify things enough for you!? Well!? Does it!?"

"You don't have to yell!" snapped Riku as he irately raised his hands, indicated his handcuffed wrists. Sora and Tess were also in handcuffs, with the four of them locked in the back of a tan van, being driven to who knows where.

It seemed like only a few seconds since Sora and his friends were at Hogwarts, celebrating with their wizard and Meta Human friends their victory over a demonic minion of Chernabog. Their trip to the famous school of witchcraft and wizardry had been marred by a conspiracy to unseal a spell capable of remaking a world into something else, while erasing the previous world.

The demon had sought out The Genesis Spell and nearly used it, but Malcolm was endowed by the powers that be with The Armageddon Spell, canceling out the first spell. After the demon had been exorcised back into hell, our heroes and allies voluntarily had all memories of both spells, specifically the ones of the spells themselves, removed and sealed away.

Afterwards they had a victory celebration with the witches and wizards of Hogwarts, along with many other witches and wizards, including Harry Potter and his extended family, as well as Max Kildare, Andrew and Jill Carpenter and The Ramblers, an elite team of Meta Humans working with The Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense.

While Sora and the gang were solving the mysterious Sigh of The Sacred Heart, Harry, Max and the others were battling against Regina, Sephiroth, Dio Brando, Lady Tremaine and Gaston, whom had been sent to Hogwarts by Maleficent and Xehanort, in order to steal the secret of The Sign. Max and Harry forced the villains away and helped The Keyblade Wielders and their friends defeat the demonic plot to use The Genesis Spell.

The victory celebration was made even more special by the announcement of the wedding of Violet Baudelaire and Shawn Ohmsford, whom were also expecting a baby, as well as the unbirthday celebration of Professor McGonagall.

But the party was ruined when Maleficent, refusing to accept defeat without retaliation, inflicted Kairi with a cursed nightmare. Earlier in the conflict, Kairi had been stung by a Tracker Jacker. Aside from enduring intense pain from the venom of the genetically engineered wasp, Kairi's mind suffered intense and horrifying hallucinations that damaged her memories.

J.D. Wallace, a Scanner working for The Bureau, used his mental abilities to begin the healing process on Kairi's mind. But all his efforts were undone as the demonic nightmare sent by Maleficent, caused Kairi to see Sora as a monstrous creature with tentacles, while also seeing Riku, Tess, Aiden and the others as zombies with tentacles.

Terrified beyond reason, Kairi fled from Sora and the others through the corridors of Hogwarts, accidentally colliding with Tara Underhill, a 7th year Ravenclaw student, Head Girl and one of the first at Hogwarts to befriend our heroes. Aside from knocking Tara to the ground, the collision also knocked free Tara's Time turner. Still terrified, Kairi accidentally used her Keyblade on the Time Turner, creating an unstable rift in time and space.

Kairi then fled into the rift. Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm pursued, but then the rift closed before Aiden or anyone else could follow.

When Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm fell from the rift they found themselves in the middle of a vast park, Central Park in New York City to be exact, with no sign of Kairi.

Almost immediately they were surrounded by Bureau operatives, including an alternate version of Max Kildare, whom wasn't too happy to see our heroes.

Before Sora and the others could react, they were handcuffed and thrown into a tan van. For the past several minutes, the van twisted and turned through the streets of Manhattan, severely disorienting Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm to much that, even if they were more familiar with New York City, they had no idea where they were anymore.

"Handcuffing and putting us in a van without windows is bad enough," said Riku. The van then lurched to the right, causing our heroes to collide with each other, "but could they at least put us in a van with seatbelts?!"

"Forgive me for stating the obvious," said Tess as they struggled to sit up, only to be knocked about as the van lurched to the left, "but I prefer the other Bureau to this one."

"At least they'd have the common courtesy to tell you what you did wrong before clapping you in irons," said Malcolm.

"This an alternate reality," said Riku, "anything could have made this world different from the other. For all we know, there's no Hogwarts, no Harry Potter."

"What about civil rights?" Tess asked, "what about due process?!" she then kicked at the metal barrier that separated them from the driver, "hey! You up there! You can't do this to us! We didn't do anything wrong!"

"I don't think the driver can hear you," said Malcolm, "this van looks pretty sturdy."

"I don't care!" snapped Tess, "all we did was fall into this world looking for Kairi! They just can't do this to us!" she then kicked the barrier again, "hey you! You bastards never read us our rights! You're illegally detaining us! I demand to speak with a lawyer! Hey!" she kicked the barrier again, "are you deaf or something!? I want a lawyer!"

"Do we even have rights in this world?" Malcolm asked, "we are aliens here."

"I still want a lawyer!" said Tess irately.

"We're pretty much on our own here," said Riku, "Aiden, Roxas and Naminé are still at Hogwarts."

"So?" Tess asked, "just cause we're separated from our friends, doesn't mean we're completely helpless. In fact," she then held up her handcuffed wrists, "why are we enduring this? We can break these cuffs with our Keyblades!"

Just then a hidden window in the barrier opened. The Bureau agents in the passenger seat looked at Tess, "you can't break those cuffs!" he said.

"So you can hear us," said Tess, "well get this! You can't arrest us for just falling onto a world. I demand a lawyer!"

"You're not under arrest," said the Bureau agent, "you're being detained. Standard policy for all trans-dimensional travelers without the proper identification."

"You bastards never asked for our identification!" snapped Tess, "my friend and I have rights and you're violating them! Now pull over and get me a lawyer!"

"Sorry," said the Bureau agent, "but considering the circumstances, your rights have been rescinded," with that he slammed the window shut.

"You bastards!" snapped Tess, "just wait until I break these cuffs!"

The window opened again, "you can't break those cuffs!" said the agent.

"Just you wait!" said Tess. She then summoned her Keyblade and tried to cut the chain, but the metal would not yield.

"What... no way!" said Tess as she tried again and again to cut the chain, but it wouldn't even scratch.

"I told you," said the agent, "now just sit back and be quiet." He then slammed the window shut.

"Bastard!" snapped Tess as she kicked the barrier again and again, "I'll carve Z's all over your damn bodies! Then I'll castrate you! I'll double castrate you!"

"Oh, give it a rest!" said Malcolm, "they're not listening and you're just wasting energy."

"At the very least, save your strength so we can figure out something," said Riku.

"Believe me, if you've got any ideas, I'm all ears," said Tess, "well, any ideas? Sora? You got any ideas? Sora? Sora?"

But Sora was just sitting there on the van floor, a look of depressed frustration on his face.

"He hasn't said anything since they clapped us in irons," said Malcolm.

"Are you okay, Sora?" Riku asked. But Sora just sat there, looking thoroughly miserable.

"He's upset that we couldn't find Kairi," said Tess, "or maybe he's messed up by that rift."

"What do you mean?" Malcolm asked. "That rift didn't mess me up."

"It certainly did me no good," said Riku, "for a second, right when we were between worlds, it felt like... like we were being watched or something."

"I didn't feel like being watched," said Malcolm, "what about you, Sora? Oh, I forgot, you're catatonic."

"I'm not," said Sora as he looked up at his friends, "I was just thinking."

"About what?" Riku asked.

"A couple things," said Sora, "like why we arrived where we did and Kairi wasn't there? Why did the rift close up after us? Why didn't Aiden and the others come? And how come we're on a world where its Max Kildare seems to hate us?"

Just then they felt the van slow down and eventually come to a stop, then felt the engine shut down.

"They'll probably drag us out of the van and into some interrogation room," said Malcolm.

"Let's not give them the chance," said Tess as she scooted over to the back door of the van, "as soon as they open that door, I'll kick whomever's there in the teeth!"

"What if that person is friendly?" Sora asked.

"It'll make me feel better breaking teeth," said Tess irately, "friend or no friend, I'm that pissed."

"Save some for us," said Riku as he scooted over to Tess, followed by Malcolm and Sora, "if they want us to cooperate, they'll have a fight on their hands!"

But instead of the door opening, Sora and the others heard a loud hiss, then saw four jets of white gas being pumped into the van.

"Oh... you sons of bitches!" snapped Malcolm, before he, Tess, Riku and Sora, all passed out from the sleeping gas.

An undetermined amount of time later, Sora woke up with a start. It took a moment for his confused mind to remember that he and the others had been exposed to sleeping gas.

Sora looked around his surroundings. He was in a well lit room that was reminiscent of a hotel suite. Two queen-sized beds covered in elaborate bedspreads, two dressers each with a mirror, between which was a large TV screen with a built in DVD player. To the left was a door that lead to a bathroom, while off to another side was a desk and chair. The room was well lit but had no windows and only one other door.

After realizing that his handcuffs were gone, Sora got out of bed and tried the door. It was unlocked, leading to a large sitting room that had several chairs, a coffee table and a large TV screen set into the wall. Off to one side was an archway that lead to a small kitchen, with three more doors lead to additional bedrooms, while a larger door was the way out. The larger room had no windows. On the table was a day by day calendar, with the date set for Thursday, December 20th, 2012.

Sora tried the big door but it was locked. He was just about to head to the other doors when Riku came out of the middle door.

"You just woke up?" Riku asked.

"Yeah," said Sora, "where are we?"

"No idea," said Sora.

Just then Tess came out of her bedroom, followed by Malcolm out of his.

"Those sons of bitches!" spat Malcolm, "they gassed us and did who knows what to us!?"

"I don't feel like I've been mistreated," said Tess, "and believe me, after what I went through on Metamore, I would know if I was mistreated."

"So what now?" Sora asked, "we could use our Keyblades to unlock the door, but then what?"

Just then they were all startled to hear a telephone ringing. It was an old style rotary phone on a small table near the kitchen.

"Aren't you going to answer it?" Riku asked as the phone continued to ring.

"Huh? Oh, right," said Sora. He then walked over to the phone and picked up the receiver, "hello?"

A female voice with a rich Southern accent answered, "why, hello, there, Sora! How are ya'll doin'?"

"Uh... we're fine," said Sora, "a little confused, but we're okay."

"Whoever that is," said an irate Tess, "tell them that we're not playing any games!"

"If they want to mess with us," said Riku, "they'll regret it!"

"You hear that!?" Sora shouted into the phone, "my friends and I don't like being made fun of!"

"Who said we wanted to mistreat you?" the voice asked, "oh, I do believe that it would be better if you put me on speakerphone."

"What?" Sora asked in a confused manner, "this kind of phone doesn't have a speakerphone."

"Just push the middle of the dial," said the voice, "trust me."

Sora felt the phone and realized that the center of the rotary was indeed a button for a speakerphone. He pressed the button and replaced the receiver. The voice was then heard by Riku, Tess and Malcolm as well.

"That's so much better," said the voice, "now, I'm currently *en route* to your location. I should be there in a minute or so, then we can get this little misunderstanding all worked out."

" *Little misunderstanding* !?" an exasperated Malcolm asked, "lady, in the past," he looked at his watch, "in the last three hours, my friends and I fell out of our world, were nearly shot by gun-happy goons, wrongfully detained, gassed and wrongfully imprisoned! If that's what you call a misunderstanding, then you're either crazy or just plain stupid!"

"I've been called worse, mind you," said the voice, "but please, try to be open minded. We at The Bureau have reason to be a little suspicious of strangers from alternate universes."

"That I can understand," said Tess, "but there was no reason for you to treat us the way you did! If that Max Kildare would have just listened to us, he would have known that we weren't evil. The other Max Kildare would have listened to us."

"I'm sure your Max would have," said the voice, "but as I'm sure you're aware of, when traveling to parallel worlds, you end up running into different versions of the same person, and no two are exactly alike."

"I get that," said Riku, "but..."

"No buts, please," said the voice, "I'm less than thirty seconds from you now, so just be a little patient and I'll explain everything."

"How come you're being so nice to us?" Sora asked.

"Because I've had time to be assured that you four are on the side of good and are enemies of those who serve the dark," said the voice.

"What do you think was happening to you while you were out to lunch? I'll tell you; our Scanners were examining your minds to see just who you are and what you were doing here."

"You should have asked us that!" snapped Malcolm. "You had no right to probe our minds!"

"Under the circumstances, we had to delve into your inner thoughts," said the voice, "and you have my most sincere apologies."

Just then our heroes heard the sound of multiple locks being released. The door opened and there stood a woman in her mid 30's with shoulder length dark brown hair and blue eyes. She wore a brown and black business suit with black high heels. In her right hand was a cane with an elaborately carved silver handle, while in her left was a cell phone, which she then pressed the 'disconnect' button, while Sora hung up the phone again.

"I can't tell ya'll how happy I am to see you face to face," said the woman, "I would have come sooner but I was stuck in a conference when ya'll fell into this little old world," she then transferred her cane to her left hand and held out her right, "Patricia Walker, 'The Tallahassee Banshee,' Deputy Director of The Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense, at your service."

"Nice to meet you, Patricia," said Sora after he, Riku, Tess and Malcolm shook hands with her, "now, where are we?"

"In a specially made suite on a secret floor of The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan," said Patricia, "officially the hotel has 47 floors, but unknown to the general public and most of the private sector,

there's three floors that exist in a pocket dimension that were added during a recent refurbishment. The Bureau uses those extra floors as part of our New York City branch.

"Now, I'm sure ya'll have a tone of questions," she then took her cane in her right hand again and limped into the room, "so, let's all just sit down and I'll start with the most obvious. What in the hell are ya'll doing here?"

"It crossed our minds," said Sora as they all sat down in the many chairs in the room.

"Well," said Patricia, "first of all, ya'll need to understand that we are aware of other worlds and have had visitors from those places. Some friendly, some down right evil, and we had to fight the evil ones.

"Sometimes it's hard to tell the good visitors from the bad ones. That's why we had your minds probed, we had to be sure of your intentions."

"And what are our intentions?" Tess asked cautiously.

"That you came here chasing after someone you care a lot about," said Patricia, she then looked at Sora, "someone you love with all of your heart. Believe me, I sympathizes with your cause and ya'll have my full support in finding Kairi. It'll take a while, but we'll find her.

"But there's more ya'll need to understand. Right now, nearly all of The Bureau's resources are being directed towards this one mission that you four fell right smack into the middle of. You have my most sincere apology for the way you were treated, especially by Max Kildare, he's actually a pretty nice guy once you get to know him, but we've been on high alert for some time now, things are getting a bit jumpy in New York City."

"So, we were just in the wrong place at the wrong time," said Sora.

"Yes," said Patricia, "or maybe you happened to come here at the right time," she then smiled, "I'm going to go out on a limb here and let ya'll in on the mission. My superiors in Congress and The U.N. won't be happy about it, but I've been assured, by a very reliable source, that you four can be trusted."

"Just who assured us of our trustworthiness?" Malcolm asked.

"Someone I trust with my life," said Patricia, "now, here's the situation," she looked at her watch, "it's now 2:36 P.M. At 8 o'clock tomorrow night, December 21st, 2012, at The American Museum of Natural History, which is right next to Central Park, just a stone's throw away from where you fell into the world, an intact copy of The Necronomicon will be put on display to the public for the very first time."

"The Necronomicon?" Riku asked "I thought they were all destroyed."

"On the world you were last on, maybe," said Patricia, "but on this world, there's still one copy left. One copy, complete and in the original Sumerian script, and believe me, we at The Bureau have done our damn best to see it destroyed."

"What went wrong?" Tess asked.

"A lot of bull crap, that's what!" said Patricia irately, "we thought we had destroyed all the known copies of The Necronomicon, but this copy was unearthed a year and a half ago in the library of a private collector in Stockholm. The poor bastard inherited it from his archeologist grandfather whom found the book while on a dig in Iraq.

"Now, we at The Bureau have a standing policy concerning The Necronomicon; search and destroy with extreme prejudice. Far too many innocent lives had been ruined because of that accursed tome and all its copies. For a while we had thought the world was finally safe from the evils of the book, but then we heard of this copy in Stockholm.

"By the time we got to the home of the owner, we were almost too late. There's something about The Necronomicon that draws those in close proximity to it, making them read its cursed pages, out loud. When we got there, the owner had read several pages. He had been torn to pieces by the otherworldly thing he had inadvertently summoned, while more dimensional nightmares were crawling their way into the world. It took hours to destroy them all.

"But when the area was cleared of monsters and the dimensional rifts that brought in the creatures were closed, all that remained was to burn the book."

At that Patricia looked like she was mad enough to punch a hole in the wall, "but before we could point a flamethrower at the damned book, our superiors in Washington told us to back off, to not destroy the book."

"Why the hell would they do that?" Malcolm asked, "the book was evil, pure and simple, so why not destroy it?"

"A very good question," said Patricia, "coming from a kid like you. You've got dark magic in your veins, but light in your heart. Some would say you're a living paradox."

"I've been called worse," said Malcolm, "but yeah, I am kinda strange. Dark magic is in my blood, but I live by my ethics."

"Can we get back to why the book of pure evil wasn't destroyed?" Riku asked.

"It's all the bureaucrats fault," said Patricia, "The BPRD cannot function without the approval of the various world governments, and by that I mean funding. Without approval from Congress, we wouldn't be able to operate on American soil, let alone anywhere else in the world.

"Somehow, word leaked out that there was a surviving copy of The Necronomicon. A wealthy supporter of The American Museum of

Natural History learned about the book and requested, or should I say, bribed and/or blackmailed, several key Senators and Representatives into putting pressure on The Bureau. At the last possible second we were prevented from carrying out our mission. Our orders were changed from destroying The Necronomicon, to returning it to Washington D.C. and handing it over to the rich bastard.

"To say that Max Kildare and The Ramblers were pissed would be an understatement. Max and his team had lost a lot of friends, both mortal and Meta Human, in their efforts to wiping out The Necronomicon. And now when they were just about ready to finish the book off for good, a rich bastard basically bought it."

"Why would the fat cat want such an evil book?" Sora asked.

"Who knows?" Patricia asked in an exasperated tone, "officially, he told us that the book was one of the oldest written texts in human history and deserved to be preserved for posterity. Bull crap, in my opinion. There's nothing human about The Necronomicon, plain and simple.

"Some of us think the bastard wants the book so he could use its power, which makes him either insane or completely stupid, in addition to being rich. And there's the possibility that he just wants it for the sake of wanting it. I mean, there's a lot of rich idiots in the world who waste their money on completely useless and often dangerous things. I won't go into details on how much trouble we have had on tracking down occult items that found their way on the black market, but let's just say that we had it rough.

"Anyway, Max and his team complied in their new orders, for the most part. They kept the book safe until it was back on American soil, all the way back to Bureau H.Q. in Washington, but that's where their compliance ended. Before the rich bastard could get to D.C. and claim the book, it was locked in a secure vault in our top security department. And when I mean top security, I mean once it goes in, it

doesn't come out, not without three keys to the vault, and all three keys were in the hands of The Ramblers.

"Max had one, the second was in the hands of Laura Hurst, whom you'll soon meet, and the last in the hands of Dr. Aaron Spartan, our resident medical genius."

"We met them," said Sora, "but they're probably different from the ones on this world."

"Ain't that the truth," said Patricia, "any hoo, Max, Laura and Aaron had the keys and they weren't giving them up. They refused to hand them over when ordered. Not even the Director of The Bureau could convince them to hand them over. No one, not Congress, not the president, not the rich bastard, not even mandate from The U.N. would get them to give them up.

"It took months to convince Max and the others that the book would be placed in a new high security area in The American Museum of Natural History, while its display case would be state of the art. In fact, some of our resident Krelboyns designed the new vault and display case."

"Krelboyns?" Riku asked.

"Super smart Meta Humans," said Patricia, "yet even after all of that, Max and the others refused to relent. It took a while, but the rich snob agreed to never touch the book, that it would stay in its display case, from which it would be moved on a completely mechanical system to the secure vault. That and a whole lot more promises finally convinced Max and the others to hand the book over to the Museum, but only if The Ramblers were the ones to transport the book to its new home."

"That sounds reasonable," said Sora, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm nodded in agreement.

"It was," said Patricia, "and at first, all seemed to go swimmingly. The display case and special vault were completed, The Ramblers handed the book over and tomorrow night, it will go on display to the public."

"So what's the catch?" Malcolm asked, "I get that Max and his team are anxious about the book being on display but..."

"You're wondering why everyone's on edge," said Patricia, "it's quite simple. Tomorrow night the book will be put on display, while The Museum will play host to a grand gala. A lot of rich backers of The Museum will be there, as well as some politicians, historians, professors, archeologists, theologians and a lot of other movers and shakers interested in seeing what is quite possibly the most dangerous book in existence."

"As if that party wasn't a security nightmare in itself, we've received word that an as yet unidentified group wishes to steal the book, and they plan to take it right in front of everyone at the premier gala."

At that she looked at Sora and the others with serious eyes, "now you understand why Max was so pissed at you," said Patricia.

"He thought we were going to try and steal The Necronomicon?" Sora asked.

"He wasn't taking any chances," said Patricia, "too much has been put at risk over this damn book. By defying orders from their superiors, Max and The Ramblers risked being labeled traitors to not only The Bureau, but to The United States, the U.N., humanity and their fellow Meta Humans... well, not to us Meta Humans, we tend to look out for each other."

"But the fact is that up until that moment, the loyalty of Max Kildare and The Ramblers had never been questioned. We Meta Humans are in a bit of a precarious position. Technically, to the general public, we don't exist. If word got out that there were people with super

powers running about, the mortals would panic and it would be chaos unbound."

"I figured as much," said Riku.

"So where does this leave us?" Malcolm asked.

"We come to a decision," said Patricia, "I've assured my superiors that you four aren't out to steal The Necronomicon, so now I wish to ask you four to help protect it, just for this one night."

"You want us to work with The Bureau and guard the book?" Tess asked.

"I just asked ya'll that," said Patricia, "you see, while we don't know exactly who will try to steal The Necronomicon, we also don't know how they'll will steal it, who they're working for and who really wants The Necronomicon.

"What we do know is that recently, our psychic Scanners have been detecting emanations of enormous power moving about. These power signatures are coming from humanoid life, but before we could determine if they're Meta Humans, demonic or otherwise and get a better location, we lose the signal and have to start searching for it all over again."

"I don't see how this affects us," said Malcolm, "sure, it's horrible that someone wants to steal The Necronomicon, most likely for some horrific, diabolic purpose, but what's it got to do with us?"

"We're putting almost everything we got into making sure that nothing happens to The Necronomicon," said Patricia, her voice full of righteous indignation, "not tomorrow night, not the day after, not ever."

"And you need more help," said Tess.

"Yes, and no," said Patricia, "any help would be welcome, and the sooner we get this particular night over with, the sooner that The Necronomicon is safe back in the special vault. That's when the special hologram projectors we installed will take over, casting an exact image of the book into the display case. When the museum opens to the general public the next day, no one will know that what they're looking at isn't the real Necronomicon."

"That's brilliant," said Malcolm, "but why haven't you done that in the first place?"

"Because the rich son of a pig wants to see the real thing before we set up the hologram," said Patricia, "we tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn't give. I'm personally fed up with arguing, so let the bastard see his precious book. The sooner that's over with, the sooner we at The Bureau can get back to our normal routine," she then gave our heroes a cheerful smile, "and the sooner we can get some of our Scanners to help you find Kairi."

"Just how good are your Scanners?" Tess asked.

"Not good enough to pin down a potential thief," said Malcolm as he irately crossed his arms.

"We're working on it," said Patricia in an annoyed tone, "believe me, these people who want The Necronomicon know how to cover their tracks. But compared to them, finding a lost girl would be easy as taking a walk down Main Street.

"Oh, I almost forgot; we've been getting increased sightings of Heartless."

"Heartless!?" exclaimed Sora as he stood up, while Tess, Riku and Malcolm now had Patricia's undivided attention.

"We know how to deal with those dark creatures," said Patricia, "sometimes there's only a handful at a time, while other instances they swarm in the thousands. Normally we're able to contain and

wipe out the things before they inflict significant harm on civilian persons and property. But with the increased security involving The Necronomicon, a Heartless attack on New York City would be too much of a coincidence."

"You'd think the thieves are using The Heartless?" Sora asked.

"It's a distinct possibility that we cannot ignore," said Patricia, "so, now comes the question; will you aid us in this trying time? Will you help keep a dangerous item from falling into the wrong hands?"

"Of course we will," said Sora, "there's no way we'll let that book be stolen."

"We're here," said Tess, "we might as well help."

"The curse of being a Keyblade Wielder," said Riku, "wherever we go, we end up meddling in local affairs."

"Hopefully for the better," said Malcolm.

"Splendid!" said a brightly smiling Patricia, "now, I'll introduce you to this world's Ramblers and the other Bureau personnel whom will be on sight at the gala," she then stood up, "and of course, we'll have to have you all fitted for the proper attire for the event. Just because we're protecting the most dangerous book in existence, doesn't mean we can't look our best, now can we?"

"Tuxedo's again," said Riku in a mildly annoyed tone, "wonderful."

"At the very least, you won't look out of place," said Patricia as she limped towards the door to the hallway.

"What happened to your leg?" Malcolm asked.

"I broke my ankle a few years ago and it never healed right," said Patricia, "so I quit fieldwork and settled into administration. Oh, and before I forget, this suite is no longer your prison," she then opened a hidden panel in the wall and pressed a button.

Almost immediately, windows appeared along the walls. Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm looked out in awe at the Manhattan skyline.

"Consider this your temporary home," said Patricia, "you're welcome to all the amenities of the hotel and are free to come and go as you please."

"Well, I'll say this," remarked Tess, "this is one adventure where we'll be sleeping comfortably."

"And with a hell of a view," said Malcolm.

Riku said nothing as he admired the skyline, but he noticed that Sora was looking out at the cityscape with something else on his mind.

' *Just hold on, Kairi,*' thought Sora, 'we'll find you.'

... Somewhere far from New York City...

Kairi woke up with a start, her heart racing from the horrific nightmare of the tentacle monster with Sora's face, her friends turned into zombies reaching out to rip her to pieces.

It took a second for Kairi to realize that she had been dreaming. As she struggled to ease her hyperventilation and slow her rapid pulse, she took stock of her situation.

At first she thought she was back in The Hospital Wing of Hogwarts, but as she looked around, taking in more details, she realized that the walls were decorated with gothic themes, bats, ghosts and other themes associated with a well crafted haunted house. Stone gargoyles adorned the walls and all in all, it was a rather... disturbing... infirmary.

Kairi felt a dull ache in her forehead. She reached up and felt a thick bandage wrapped around her head.

All of a sudden, Kairi heard the approaching of several footsteps. Flinging herself back onto the bed, she shut her eyes and feigned sleep.

The door of the infirmary opened and Kairi heard four individuals enter. The voices of these individuals came from teenaged girls, each one very different from the others.

"She's still out cold," said one girl, a voice that radiated with warmth and kindness.

"It's no wonder," said the second girl, this one with a slight Romanian accent, "the way she hit that locker after falling through that rift, all that... that..."

"It's okay, love," said a third girl, one with an Australian accent, "we know what happened."

"No, it's alright," said the second girl, "the more I get used to saying the word... blood," she then inhaled sharply, as if experiencing a brief anxiety attack, "the better it'll be for me. She was... bleeding... so much, I thought she wouldn't make it."

"Thank Ra that our school nurse is so much more than a nurse," said the fourth girl, one with a refined voice that reflected a personality that was used to being respected and revered by all those around her, yet still had much friendship and compassion in her heart.

"Yeah," said the first girl, "I thought we would need to call an ambulance, but the nurse used an that healing item that cleared up that... what was it?"

"A concussion," said the third girl, "and it also stopped the bleeding."

"If my family had the rights to that kind of metical technology," said the fourth girl, "we would have made billions."

"As if your family had enough money as it is," said the third girl.

"Yes, if my family can be accused of being filthy, it's at least money that we're rolling in. Now," Kairi then heard a pair of wedgie sandals approaching the bed she was on, "what about our strange Normie friend from another world?"

"I'm sure Headmistress Bloodgood would want to talk to her as soon as she wakes up," said the second girl.

"If anyone can figure out where this girl came from," said the third voice, "it's the Headmistress."

"And hopefully send her back," said the fourth girl in a cold, somewhat scared tone.

"You can't mean that, Cleo," said the first girl, "she's hurt and scared out of her mind, at least she was scared when she fell through that rift. She was clearly running from something."

"Or someone," said the third girl, "Frankie, maybe our new friend is on the run from an abusive boyfriend."

"Or maybe a hideous demon," said the second girl in an eager, somewhat frightened tone, "some kind of multi-headed fiend from the depths of hell! She may be marked for demonic sacrifice!"

"Chill out, Draculaura," said the third girl, "we don't know anything about her."

"You're right, Lagoona," said the second girl, Draculaura, "you can't judge a book by its cover."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't treat her like a friend," said the first girl, Frankie.

Kairi cracked her eyes open to look at the four girls talking about her.

Draculaura was easily the shortest of the four girls, despite her pink knee-length, spiked-heeled, lace-up boots. She had long, black hair with pink streaks done up in two pigtails, pale-purple eyes, pale-pink

skin with a pink, heart-shaped birthmark below her left eye. Her ears were pointed and her canine teeth were elongated, like fangs.

Aside from her boots, Draculaura wore a pink vest with two gray buttons with fishnet sleeves ending in white frills, a white jabot collar was adorned with a pink flower jewel necklace. Below waist level, she wore a short, white, frilly skirt with black lace underneath and slight pink stitching, with black fishnet tights matching her shirt, which at knee height became covered by her pink boots. As accessories she wore light grey safety pin earrings, while in her hands was a folded black and pink parasol. Draculaura had a sweet, friendly, easy to get along with personality, but also a bit naïve and very excitable.

Lagoona was about 15 with long, curly blond hair with blue highlights, with skin covered in pale blue scales, webbed hands and had fins protruding from her lower arms and legs. She had yellow eyes and wore a pink scale bathing suit with a teal scaly and black jacket with a hoodie over it the hood has blue mesh fins on it and black and teal board shorts with blue fishnet tights. Her shoes were black flip flops with black and white striped soles. She also wore gold earrings with coral and sand dollars on them, a gold beaded necklace with a seahorse, a gold beaded bracelet, and a pink lily barrette in her hair.

Lagoona had a friendly, laidback, easygoing personality that radiated serenity and kindness. She was calm and level-headed but wasn't afraid to stand up for what was right.

Cleo, apparent age 16 or so, was the most normal-looking of the four girls, yet even she had features that would make her stand out in a crowd, and she was one who relished in standing out. She had long black hair with brown and gold highlights, flawless mocha skin and turquoise eyes. Her face was adorned with thick, bright eyeshadow, cherry-red lipgloss, thick black eye liner styled in an Egyptian manner.

Cleo wore a strapless jumpsuit made of yellow-colored mummy wrappings with a turquoise wrapped organdy top with black lining. She carried her phone on a strap on her thigh. Her shoes were black wedges with round gold studs along the bottom. She accessorized with gold jewelry which included a studded belt, pyramid like earrings, a golden arm bracelet, and a headdress with jewels, and mummy wrappings around her arm.

Cleo was of conflicting personalities. On one hand she seemed selfish, spoiled, arrogant and had a lot of hubris, as if she expected the whole world to worship at her feet. She was extremely competitive and strove to be number 1 in everything she put herself into. On the other hand there was compassion in her heart, a willingness to work with others for a common goal, and much love for those she was close to.

Finally there was Frankie, about 15 or 16 with long white hair with black streaks with a side fringe that covered her forehead that was secured with a hairclip. She wore a green and black plaid dress with a white collar and organdy puff sleeves. For accessories, she wore a black polka-dotted tie with a silver skull pin, a black studded belt with a lightning bolt buckle and a chain, blue skull earrings and blue and silver bracelets with black and white stiletto shoes.

What was most noticeable about the girl was her light, mint green skin with various stitches across her body, as if she was held together with thread. Her left eye was green and the right was blue. Adorning her neck were two metal bolts.

Frankie was sweet, polite, friendly and outgoing, eager to experience new things and wasn't afraid to admit to making a mistake, always upbeat, hopeful and determined to move forward and make the day a little bit brighter.

It didn't take a genius to determine that these four very unusual young women were friends, but to Kairi, an argument was brewing between them.

"She seems harmless to me," said Lagoona, "poor thing, what could have made her so frightened?"

"It's a demon, it's got to be," said Draculaura, "or something just as mean and scary."

"Whatever it was," said Cleo as she eyed Kairi suspiciously, "it could mean trouble for us Monsters."

' *Monsters?*' Kairi thought, *'they certainly are trendy monsters.'*

"How can you even think this person is trouble?" Frankie asked, "yes, she may be *in* trouble, but there's no reason to suspect that her troubles will spread to us. At the very least, if she is in trouble, we should try to help her."

"Frankie's right," said Lagoona, "it's only right to help out those in need."

"Be as that may," said Cleo in an annoyed tone as she placed her hands on her hips, "this person is a stranger that fell out of a strange rift in time and space. Even more so, she's a Normie."

"And you think that makes a difference?" Draculaura asked in an annoyed tone, "after what we all went through on Halloween?"

"We did make things better for the Normies in our town," said Frankie.

"We've had the chance to get to know them," said Cleo, "for all we know, this girl is just passing through, dragging who knows what kind of trouble with her. And there's no reason to believe that she won't accept us!"

"Are you implying what I think you're implying!?" Lagoona demanded, "because, ghoulish friend, if you're reverting to the old prejudices, then..."

"All I'm saying is that when she wakes up," said Cleo as she pointed at Kairi, "she'll see us Monsters and go complete berserk! She'll react like any Normie; she'll see us as freaks and try to run away!"

At that Kairi had had enough of playing possum. She fully opened her eyes and sat up, "you're not monsters," she said, "you're beautiful people."

At that the four unusual girls were slightly taken aback as they realized that Kairi had been listening to them. Cleo then broke the silence as she cautiously asked, "you... you think we're beautiful?"

"Yeah," said Kairi, "albeit a bit... unusual... but still beautiful."

Cleo blushed slightly at the compliment, then spoke boldly and with much flourish of her hands, as if she were a figure in an Egyptian hieroglyph wall carving, "well, of course you think I'm beautiful. After all, a princess of my noble heritage can hardly be anything but beautiful. Feel free to worship the ground I walk on."

"You'll have to excuse Cleo, love," said Lagoona as she walked over and sat next to Kairi, "she's one serious fish out of water."

"She was an Egyptian princess," said Draculaura.

"I still am," said Cleo. She then looked at Kairi as if addressing a peasant, "you have the honor and privilege of addressing the most noble and regal Cleo de Nile, daughter of Ramses de Nile, captain of the Fearleading squad and rising star of Monster High."

"There's a school for monsters?" Kairi asked.

"Of course," said Draculaura, "what, you'd think we'd teach ourselves? I'm Draculaura, and before you ask, I'm a vegetarian vampire."

"I know some 'vegetarian vampires,'" said Kairi as she smiled, "do you drink animal blood?"

"Goodness, no!" exclaimed Draculaura as her hands went up to her face in shock, "I would never harm an animal."

"Draculaura only eats vegetables," said Lagoona, "even the word 'blood' used to make her swoon, but she's getting over it. I'm Lagoona Blue, from The Great Barrier Reef, and yes, I am a Sea Monster."

"And I'm Frankie Stein," said the green-skinned girl, "my parents created me, the same way they were created by Dr. Henry Frankenstein."

"And they named you after their creator," said Kairi, "cool."

"Oh, she likes me!" said Frankie happily, while sparks of electricity shot out of her neck bolts.

"And how about me?" Draculaura, "are you okay with a vampire?"

"I've seen good vampires and evil vampires," said Kairi, "I've fought with the good and against the evil."

"How can you tell the difference?" Cleo asked.

"The good ones never drink the blood of humans, if they can help it," said Kairi, "and use their powers to protect the innocent. I've known vampires who had never even spilled a drop of human blood in their immortal lives. As for the bad ones, they kill people and drink their blood not only to sustain themselves, but because they enjoy destroying innocence and spreading darkness wherever they go."

"Sounds like my uncle Radu on a bad day," said Draculaura.

"You really think we're alright?" Lagoona asked.

"Definitely," said Kairi, "I kinda have a knack for seeing the goodness in people's hearts."

"Well, I knew you were alright when you first showed up," said Frankie, "even after you kinda fell on me."

"I did what?" Kairi asked.

"You fell out of a rift right in the middle of the hallway," said Lagoona, "you hit your head on a locker and then you landed right on Frankie."

"I did?" Kairi asked as she felt her forehead, "wow, sorry about that."

"It's alright," said Frankie, "I'm tougher than I look."

"I can see that," said Kairi. She then looked at Cleo, Lagoona and Draculaura, "you all are special in your own rights. I just hope I'll be around long enough to get to know you all better."

"Why's that?" Lagoona asked.

"You're not going away so soon?" Draculaura asked, "you just woke up."

"You should be taken to a Normie hospital," said Cleo, "the sooner the better."

"Why bother with all the hospital bureaucratic red tape and insurance crap?" Kairi asked as she began unwrapping the bandage around her head, "I don't think they'll even take my insurance in this world. And what is a Normie anyway."

"It's slang for Normal," said Cleo, "there's humans and then there's us Monsters, and there's a lot more of us than you might think."

"We'll introduce you to more of our friends," said Frankie, "but you really need to rest up."

"I'll be fine," said Kairi, "but I'd like to see a mirror if you've got one."

"Of course I've got one!" said Cleo in a slightly offended tone. She then pulled out a compact mirror and handed it to Kairi, "never leave

home without one."

"Thanks," said Kairi as she opened the compact and saw her reflection. A long scar had formed on her forehead that still looked very sore but closed up, while the skin around it was heavily bruised, "wow, I really did a number on my head."

"The nurse managed to stop the bleeding and accelerated the healing process," said Frankie.

"And now I'll finish it," said Kairi. She then touched the scar and used her healing magic to vanish it, while the bruising also went away.

"Oh my Ra!" exclaimed an astonished Cleo, while Frankie, Lagoona and Draculaura also looked amazed.

"Did I say you were alright?" Frankie asked, "you're awesome!"

"Totts!" exclaimed Draculaura eagerly.

"It's alright," said Cleo, "but I've seen equally impressive magic."

"Oh really?" Lagoona asked daringly, "then how come all those idols and talismans and other pieces of Egyptian magic that you've used so much, how come they always end up making things worse instead of better?"

"Well, most magical items from the old country are cursed," said Cleo in a matter of fact tone, "I just have a hard time telling the difference, that's all."

"I think you need a better understanding of magic," said Kairi, "but other than that, you're perfectly fine."

"Is that all?" Cleo asked, "fine? Why be fine, ordinary, when you can be extraordinary? Dream big."

"I do have big dreams," said Kairi. She then frowned, "I mean, I did, now..." But she hesitated about telling Frankie and the others about

what happened, about how Sora was torn apart about The Tentacle Creature, while Riku and the others were turned into zombies and how they haunted her dreams.

"Hey, it's okay," said Frankie as she put a comforting hand on Kairi's shoulder, "you don't have to tell us if it makes you feel uncomfortable."

"No, it's alright," said Kairi, "I... I recently went through something really terrible, something that's going to mess with my head for a long time," she then placed her hand over her heart, "but no matter how horrible it was, nothing is going to steal the goodness, the light, within me. I may be down, but I'm far from out."

"That's the spirit!" said Frankie happily, while Cleo, Lagoona and Draculaura nodded in agreement.

"Well, if you're up to it," said Lagoona, "the Headmistress would like to talk to you about your situation."

"I'd like to talk to her," said Kairi, "not that I want to leave so soon, but the sooner I get in contact with my home dimension, the better," she then frowned, "I just hope everyone else is alright."

... Hogwarts...

"Can't you do something!?" Aiden spat at Harry and Max as he paced back and forth irately in Professor McGonagall's office. Also there was the Headmistress herself, as well as Roxas, Naminé, Hermione, Ron, Andrew, Jill, Aaron, Jessie, Ashley and Tara.

"You two are like the best this world has to offer. You've got The Ministry of Magic and The BPRD at your disposal, and you tell me you can't do anything to fight Sora, Riku, Tess and Kairi?!"

"I never said we can't do anything," said Max in an annoyed tone, "I said it would take time."

"Time isn't something we have, pal!" said Aiden, "it's been over three hours since they ran into that rift! For all we know, my friends are neck deep in Heartless!"

"Well, what do you expect us to do?" Harry asked, "just magic up some kind of rift spell and send you off to some random world?"

"You could wind up on some horrific mirror world," said Jill.

"Mirror world?" Roxas asked, "like where everything is backwards?"

"It's one possibility," said Andrew, "but that's not what we're talking about."

"Jill meant a world with a negative situation," said Aaron, "on our world, at this moment in time, we're winning the wars on terrorism, drugs and we've got a lot of the international conflicts pretty much wrapped up. We've got better treatments for AIDS, cancer and other nasty diseases that had been plaguing humanity. Crime, poverty, joblessness, homelessness and world hunger are at all time lows. Nearly every country in the world has modern education and medical systems. We have new, safer means of drilling for oil, more efficient car engines that produce less pollution. The oceans are cleaner than they were ten years ago. The hole in the ozone layer will be closed for good within five. And a date has been set for a manned mission to Mars."

"And to add icing to the cake," said Hermione, "relationships between Wizards and Muggles have never been better. Our world is slowly but surely becoming a paradise for all."

"And it's partly thanks to the cooperation between magic users and Meta Humans," said Max.

"Now," said Jill, "imagine a world where none of this happened. Imagine a world that'll run out of natural resources in a matter of decades, where pollution is slowly choking the life out of the

environment, where cancer, AIDS and other virulent diseases run rampant, killing tens of thousands each day."

"Imagine a world where hundreds of millions are out of work," said Andrew, "where the average family can barely afford to keep clothes on their backs, a roof over their heads and food in their bellies," he shuddered, "not my favorite world, by the way. Anyway, imagine a world where nearly everywhere you look, you see people zonked out of their minds on drugs, where crime has spiraled out of control, where governments cease to function, all in all, a world where the question isn't 'what will I do tomorrow?' but 'will I live to see tomorrow?'"

"You mean Sora and the others could be on one of these hell holes!?" Aiden exclaimed.

"It gets worse," said Jill, "they could be on a world where wizards and Meta Humans are persecuted, just because we're different from the 'normal' population. Or worse, a world where humans have been dominated by Meta Humans and wizards."

"There could be worlds where Voldemort won," said Harry, "where Muggle Born witches and wizards are murdered on sight and Muggles are enslaved."

"There could be worlds where The BPRD is a paramilitary group bent on dominating the world," said Jill.

"I think we've frightened them enough," said Ron. Indeed, Aiden, Roxas and Naminé looked horrified almost out of their skins.

"Do we really need to give them more worst case scenarios?" Ashley asked. She then gave Aiden, Roxas and Naminé a reassuring smile, "we're doing every thing we can to find Sora and the others, but we have to bring in the right equipment. This isn't the first time we've had to search for someone lost in time and space."

"The problem is adapting Bureau technology so it will function at Hogwarts," said Jessie, "the very magical nature of the castle interferes with Muggle machines. Most of the time a Muggle device fails to function, other times its power source overheats and it blows up, not a pretty sight to see."

"I've seen plenty of Lithium Ion batteries go critical," said Andrew, "not something you want to be in rage of. Anyway, providing the Dimensional Search Engine with a magic patch shouldn't take more than a day or so."

"A day!?" exclaimed Aiden, "they've already been gone more than three hours! They'll be dead by this time tomorrow!"

"Do you really think that little of your friends, Mr. Mackenzie?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"I... uh... that is..." said a sheepish Aiden as he began to calm down, "well... Sora, maybe, he is a bit of a lazy bum, or so Kairi says."

"They'll be alright," said Roxas, "at least, so long as they stick together. Sora's got his blockhead moments, but Riku, Tess and Malcolm will keep him from going sideways."

"And we'd know if anything would happen to them," said Naminé, "I'm still connected to Kairi's heart, just as Roxas is connected to Sora's. Don't ask me if I can tell where they are, I only know that Kairi's still alive."

"Same with Sora," said Roxas.

"It's a start," said Max, "and the search may not need to take so long. While there's an infinite number of realities that Sora and the others could have landed on, we have started eliminating the possibilities."

"We've been in contact with alternate Bureau's for some time now," said Jill, "Our first conversation with a parallel Bureau was in 2011,

and since then we've made contact with over a hundred different BPRD's, while some of them are in contact with even more versions."

"Some of these versions have the same people," said Aaron, "sometimes with different backgrounds and experiences, but all in all the core essence is there. And while travel to these alternate realities has been limited, we have a mutual understanding with a lot of the different worlds to pool information when needed."

"A trans-dimensional social network," said Hermione.

"Something of that manner," said Aaron, "all that's needed is to bring in the Dimensional Communicator and we'll begin scanning the worlds' we've made contact with. Hopefully, one of the worlds on our contact list may have picked up our misplaced friends."

"And how soon can the machine get here?" Aiden asked.

"It's being packed and shipped as we speak," said Jill, "it'll be airborne within the hour and, assuming they don't run into any problems, should be landing in Edinburg in four or five hours, then it'll be sent to Hogsmeade directly and assembled right here. The problem is to apply the magic patch."

"And how long will that take?" Naminé asked. She immediately regretted asking.

"It should be operational by tomorrow," said Jill.

"I think I'm going to be sick," said Aiden as he slumped down on the floor, while Roxas and Naminé also sat down with depressed looks on their face.

"But I'm sure we'll be able to speed up the process!" Jill said hastily. She then looked at Harry, Hermione, Ron and Jessie, "won't we?"

"Of course we will," said Hermione in a reassuring tone, "the only serious delay is waiting for the equipment to arrive."

"Why do we have to wait for the machines to be transported via Muggle means?" Jessie asked, "Owl Post is much faster."

"Those machines contain extremely sensitive parts," Ashley, "you try having an owl or a Parliament of owls, carrying one of those parts. One good crosswind and the part is useless. No, The Bureau has its own means of transporting equipment without damage. We'll get the machines here intact, and on time."

"In the meantime, we're stuck here with nothing to do but wait," said Aiden in a miserable tone, "while our friends are in the gods know what kind of trouble." At that Roxas and Naminé nodded in depressed agreement.

"Oh come on," said Andrew, "there's plenty to do. Now get up! We're going to the kitchens. You said you wanted to be a better cook, Aiden? Well, class is back in session. Roxas, Naminé, you're coming too."

"Don't argue with him," said Jill, "when it comes to cooking, my husband means business."

"Well, we might as well go," said Aiden as he, Roxas and Naminé got up. They then followed Andrew out of McGonagall's office.

"There, Andrew will surely keep those three occupied until the machines are all set up," said Max.

"Isn't there anything else we can do?" Harry asked.

"What else can we do, mate?" Ron asked, "ask Professor Trelawney to look into her crystal ball and find Sora and the others?"

"That's actually not a bad idea," said Jessie.

"You can't be serious," said Hermione, "Professor Trelawney is no Seerer."

"She has had true prophecies before," said Jill, "one of them came true this weekend. Yes, Sybil is mostly all talk and misdirection, but I believe, or maybe I just want to believe, that this is her moment in the sun."

"What say you, Minerva?" Jill asked, "Sybil is one of your staff."

"My personal feelings towards Professor Trelawney have no bearing over the current situation," said Professor McGonagall, "we should explore all possible avenues that could lead to the rescue of the young Keyblade Wielders, even if those avenues are... unconventional."

"I'll talk to Sybil," said Jessie as she headed for the doorway, "hopefully she'll be able to give us a clue that'll help."

"Next thing we'll all be reading tea leaves again," said Ron.

"Speaking of which," said Professor McGonagall, "I do believe a cup of tea would do a world of good."

"You have anything stronger here?" Jill asked.

"Not in my office, no," said Professor McGonagall, "but, I believe a short visit to The Three Broomsticks would do no harm."

"I'm amazed that the pub wasn't destroyed during the fight with those villains," said Harry as they all prepared to go down to Hogsmeade, where the combined efforts of Ministry wizards and BPRD agents, were rapidly repairing the damage inflicted in the recent battle.

"Stranger things have happened," said Max, "I'm living proof."

But then Harry frowned.

"What's wrong?" Hermione asked.

"I just had a disturbing thought," said Harry, "while we're looking for Sora and the others, no doubt that Maleficent and Xehanort are looking for them as well."

"Then we'd better find them first," said Max, "I'm getting a little peeved off at both of those maniacs."

"You want to go after them?" Jill asked, "it'd be risky."

"And when have you ever turned down a dangerous mission?" Max asked, "even after becoming a mother."

"I was just concerned that you might be thinking of going alone," said Jill.

"Are you kidding?" Max asked, "like I'd deny you or the others a chance to rid existence of two great evils."

"There's more of them this time," said Harry, "but it's the same thing; they mean to inflict harm on innocent people. They must be stopped."

... Castle Oblivion...

"Can't this thing search any faster?" Gaston asked as he impatiently paced back and forth in the viewing room, while Dio Brando, Regina, Maleficent, Sephiroth, Doctor Insano and Xehanort, sat in comfortable chairs, while The Interocitor scanned time and space. Sephiroth and Regina were currently playing Triple Triad, with her right in the middle of a winning streak, Dio Brando was playing with a large Rubik's Cube, Insano was messing with some kind of gadget, while Xehanort was currently engaged in a battle of mental prowess with Maleficent; they both had hooked electrodes to their heads and were playing a game of virtual chess with only their minds. Maleficent was black and Xehanort was white.

"Hey, man, it's only been like three hours," said Dio Brando as he rotated the cube in his hands, "it's a big multi-verse."

"Getting upset won't help find Sora and his friends any sooner," said Regina. She then flipped one of Sephiroth's cards, "it appears I win again."

"That's fifteen in a row!" snapped the one winged angel as he threw down the cards in his hand, "you're cheating, woman!"

"Of course I'm cheating," said a viciously smiling Regina as she claimed one of Sephiroth's cards as a prize, "but the question is 'how' am I cheating?"

"If I ever find out, I'll take you apart, piece by piece," said Sephiroth.

"I can't stand this!" exclaimed Gaston irately, a look of anxious frustration on his face, "I need to destroy something! I'm going to explode if I don't destroy something!"

"Oh, now we can't have that, can we?" Insano asked, "if you need to blow off some energy, trash one of the rooms in the castle, there's plenty to go around."

"This castle holds more value in a single room than you could ever earn in a thousand lifetimes!" said Xehanort as he continued to focus on the virtual chessboard, neither he nor Maleficent wavering in their concentration. "If you must destroy something, smash some practice droids, it's what they're here for."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll do that," said Gaston as he headed for the door.

"Just remember to clean up after yourself," said Insano, "we really ought to hire a cleaning service."

"It's on my to do list," said Xehanort.

"Well, until then," said Insano as he glared at Gaston through his goggles, "try not to destroy the whole castle while you're exercising."

"Some day, madman!" snapped Gaston, "some day, I will find out how to free myself from your control! Then we'll see how easily the axe slices through the meat!" with that he stomped out of the room.

"Either I truly am mad," said Insano, "or that made no sense at all!" he then giggled like the lunatic he was.

At that moment, Lady Tremaine walked into the room, her nose buried in a very thick book. She then looked up from her reading to glare at Insano, "will you stop with that obscene giggling! My situation is nerve grinding enough without you laughing all the time!"

"Am I really that annoying?" Insano asked, "does my laugh make you want to pour hot led into your ears?"

"I'd rather pour hot led down your throat!" snapped Lady Tremaine as she walked over to a chair and sat down. She then looked at Maleficent and Xehanort and their game of thought-controlled chess, "exactly what is the purpose of such a device?" she then pointed at the virtual chess board and the electrodes attached to it.

"It's a test of mental strength," said Regina, "not only must they move the pieces by thought, for ever piece taken, the player must put forth more effort to continue the game. Not only is this a contest of skill, but of endurance.

Indeed, several pieces had been taken on both sides, while the strain of their efforts was showing on the player's faces. But then Maleficent moved a Rook into position, while Xehanort looked at the board for several seconds, then moved a Knight into position.

At that Maleficent looked up from the board and glared irately at Xehanort, "you deceitful old man! You were playing to draw!"

"Indeed," said Xehanort as he removed the electrodes from his head, "In fact, I had been playing to draw from the very beginning."

At that Maleficent was about to scream irately and throw a curse at Xehanort, but she calmed down enough to smile viciously, "so, not only were you playing to draw, you were also playing me for a fool. You engineered this whole contest just to see me lose my temper."

"Have I become that transparent?" Xehanort asked, "well then, how about a different contest? It may be some time before The Interocitor locates our missing Keyblade Wielding friends. We shall use that time to come up with a proper stratagem to torment Sora and his companions."

"A tempting competition," said Maleficent, "and what do you wish to wager?"

"Whoever imagines the more brilliant strategy," said Xehanort, "a strategy that will bring out the most anguish in Sora's heart, is owed a favor by the other."

"A favor?" Maleficent asked.

"One favor," said Xehanort, "a single request that, if it is within the persons' power, will be granted without question. Is this not a fitting wager?"

"It is," said Maleficent as he held out her hand, "one favor to the winner of this contest." With that she and Xehanort shook on it and the two of them sat down to begin planning their horrific strategies.

"I've got a feeling that all the pain and misery Sora has gone through so far," said Dio Brando, "all the hell he's fought and endured, is going to seem like heaven compared to what those two are going to put him through."

"You may be right," said Sephiroth as he and Regina began another game of Triple Triad. But within seconds, Regina had won again, "Curse you, woman! That's sixteen! How are you cheating!?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out," said Regina as she took another of Sephiroth's cards.

Deep within the infinite expanse of cyberspace there lay a private chat room set up so that only those with a complex password could access it. Currently only three users were in the chat room.

Killerfist819: I think the fuzz is on to us.

Frostqueen70: Impossible, we've been covering our tracks.

Quantummad666: Never underestimate The Bureau. We're lucky they only suspect us.

Frostqueen70: One on my team wants to back off. She's being an idiot. The other says go for it.

Killerfist819: Some of my people want to play it safe, wait for another night to pull the job.

Quantummad666: We can't wait. The plan to bring down the security measures must be initiated tomorrow night, it's timed for tomorrow night.

Forstqueen70: If we can't get it tomorrow night we might as well as forget about it.

Killerfist819: Without the book all our efforts would be for nothing. Our dream of a new, better world, it will amount to nothing without the book.

Frostqueen70: It's your dream, not ours, remember?

Killerfist819: I know, all you care about is using the book. I remember the pact. After the ritual is complete, you and your ilk are free to go, with the book, back to whatever hole you crawled out from.

Frostqueen70: Be grateful that my sisters and I won't destroy you in the process.

Quantummad666: Stop it! Petty bickering won't bring us closer to the book.

Killerfist819: Then what do you suggest we do? If The Bureau is as tenacious as you say, then we should call it off.

Quantummad666: If all goes according to plan, then The BPRD will be too late to stop us. You and your friends just focus on acquiring the sacrifice.

Killerfist819: We'll have the girl, just so long as the terrible trio doesn't screw things up.

Frostqueen70: We'll have the book, so long as our lunatic friend has everything else set up.

Quantummad666: Everything will be ready on my part. Be at ease, my friends. In less than 48 hours, everything we want will be right in our hands.

Frostqueen70: I'll hold you to that.

Killerfist819: Me too. My group and I have been getting the short end of the stick for too long. It's time the world learned the truth, whether they want it or not.

Quantummad666: Be at ease, my comrades. All our efforts will bear fruit. The only thing we have to worry about is whether or not our benefactors pull through on their end.

Killerfist819: They'd better, or else there'll be hell to pay!

Frostqueen70: My sisters and I have come too far just to be stopped by our so called benefactors. If they don't pull through, we'll destroy them.

Killerfist819: Not if my group destroys them first. The only thing we can do now is wait.

Quantummad666: Until tomorrow night, then.

Killerfist819: Until tomorrow night.

Forstqueen70: Until tomorrow night.

The end of chapter 1

Next chapter finds Sora and the others getting to know more of The Ramblers and learning more about their mission, while Kairi meets several students at Monster High. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Making Friends & Plans

Last time found Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm captured by the alternate BPRD on the alternate world they had fallen into. But their captivity was short lived as Patricia Walker, Deputy Director of The Bureau, assured our heroes that they we're all on the same side. Aparently, The Bureau was on high alert in anticipation of a grand gala in which the last intact Necronomicon would be put on display in a museum, while a threat had been made to steal the insidious book. Sora and the gang were asked to help protect The Necronomicon, while also assured that a serch for Kairi would be made. Our heroes then accepted the mission.

Elsewhere, Kairi woke up in Monster High, where she met Frankie Stein and her fellow ghoulfriends. After telling the fangasticly fabulous Monsters that she was alright, Kairi quickly made friends with Frankie and the others, reassuring her that she was safe. Yet Kairi still remained troubled by the cursed nightmare, haunted by her twisted memories of Sora and the others.

Back at Hogwarts, efforts went underway to locate Sora and the others, while Aiden, Roxas and Naminé were on the verge of panic attacks.

At Castle Oblivion, Maleficent and Xehanort made a wager as to who could come up with the worst torment for Sora.

Elsewhere still, the dark cabal out to steal The Necronomicon made their final insidious plans. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 2: Making Friends & Plans

... New York City... Waldorf-Astoria Hotel... BPRD HQ

"Well?" Patricia asked Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm as she showed our heroes to the room where The Bureau had set up their command

post for the upcoming gala. "What do you think?"

The room was similar to any command post for a top secret operation; several rows of computer stations that monitored multiple security camera angles in the museum, inside and outside the building, while other computer screens showed status for all the museum security systems, as well as monitoring the building utilities.

Several operatives were at their stations, running security checks and testing communications, while off to one side, Max Kildare was speaking with two of his fellow Ramblers and a third person.

"From here we can control everything at the gala," said Patricia, "every angle inside and outside the building is covered with multi-spectrum cameras. Someone tries sneaking in with stealth, we can track his body heat, air displacement, even his smell.

"We also have sound stations. Every word said by everyone inside the museum will be recorded and examined for illicit intent. Our Scanners will also be keeping a watch for anyone hiding their thoughts.

"We've installed special Panic Doors in all the exits of the gallery where the book will be showcased. These doors are capable of enduring a 5 Megaton blast, while the walls are also reinforced. All air vents in the gallery can be sealed off and an internal air refreshing system engaged, as well as a triple backup electricity system.

"Throughout the building are various 'capture' systems; stun traps designed to contain any intruders without harming the priceless historical pieces within the museum. All undercover police and Bureau agents will be armed with stun weapons also designed to inflict as little collateral damage to the building.

"Subsequence containment doors have been installed in the access routes to and from the gallery and in all the main entry points of the museum. All rooftop access points, underground utility ports and all

the windows have blast shields installed that can be activated at the push of a button."

She then limped over to the main computer terminal where a big red button was connected to the computer network. The button was covered with a locked glass box, while in front of the button were three more locks.

"That's the Panic Button," said Patricia, "when the gala starts and the guests start arriving, three keys will be inserted into those locks. When the main event starts and the book is about to be unveiled, the keys will be turned, arming the emergency system, but we can arm it early in the event of a suspected threat.

"Once armed, all it takes is to push the button and the entire museum will be locked down; nothing will get in or out, for at least twenty minutes. At that point a release code will unlock the building. The release code is broken in half. The control room team has one half, while several agents inside have the other. Both parts of the code must be used to unseal the building."

"What if something goes wrong and you need to get everyone out?" Riku asked, "like a fire or a gas leak?"

"The building is fully electric," said Patricia, "and there are sensors that will pick up even the most minute trace of smoke, fire, poison gas, radiation and even biological and chemical weapons. Of course, we'll also be taking into consideration the safety of the guests and they will be evacuated if practical. If not, then there's a special panic room built into the far end of the gallery. If the guests are in harms way and we can't get them out, they'll be safe in the panic room. Any other questions?"

"Who has the keys for the system?" Sora asked.

"I have one," said Patricia as she pulled out one key, "the second is in the hands of the command post leader and the third is in one of our observing scientists."

"Remind me just what you want us to do?" Tess asked.

"Just be there and be ready to kick ass," said Max as he walked over, followed by the three persons. The first was a girl, about twenty or so, with long dirty blond hair, amber eyes and was about 5' even. She wore a blue and white top and skirt with blue sandals and the tan BPRD jacket. This was Laura Hurst, quite possibly the most powerful Scanner in the world.

The second and third persons were exact doubles for Leon Smyth-Falcon, quite possibly the fastest man alive, and Dr. Aaron Spartan M.D., a brilliant physician, surgeon and overall medic for The Bureau. These two, like the Max Kildare whom earlier held Sora and the others at gunpoint, looked exactly like the Leon Smyth-Falcon and Aaron Spartan that they knew from before, only a few years younger and minus a few battle scars.

"So these are the adventurers from another world," said Leon Smyth-Falcon, his voice heavy with a New Orleans accent, "you're either incredibly brave or incredibly stupid to show up at this time."

"It wasn't their fault, you county bumpkin!" snapped Laura Hurst, "they were chasing after their sick friend. I saw their minds, they have nothing but good intentions in their thoughts and hearts," she looked at Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, "I'm sorry I had to go into your minds without your permission, but I had to know the truth. All I can do to apologize is promise to help you find Kairi."

"We will find your friend," said Aaron Spartan, "from what Laura learned of what happened, Kairi was poisoned with the venom of a genetically engendered wasp that inflicted a lot of damage to her mind."

"Tracker Jackers," said Malcolm, "vicious little buggers."

"But J.D. told us that he had healed the damage," said Sora, "that all Kairi needed was rest. I still don't get what caused her to freak out like that."

"Whatever the cause," said Aaron, "if we can find her, I can figure out a treatment."

"A little mind melding and I'll pull that nightmare right out of her," said Laura as she gave our heroes a confident smile.

"And it seems that I owe you four an apology," said Max, "I shouldn't have let my temper get the best of me."

"Hey, it's not really your fault," said Tess, "we fell into your world right in the middle of a hazardous mission. Believe me, I've been in more dangerous situations than I'd like to count."

"I still want to say I'm sorry," said Max, "part of me knew, from the moment I saw you, that you kids weren't the enemy, that we were allies at heart," he then sighed, "I guess I'm more tired than I thought."

"When did you last get a full night's sleep?" Aaron asked.

"I'm not sleep deprived enough to have forgotten that you asked me that three times already this week," said Max, "and I'll give you the same answer. I haven't had a decent night's sleep since we were ordered *not* to destroy The Necronomicon."

"And how much sleep have you been averaging over the past eighteen months?" Patricia asked.

"About an hour or so each night," said Aaron, "I know, I've been keeping track. I'm tired too, we're all tired. The sooner this mess is over with, the sooner we can all get some rest. I for one have a long vacation already planned," he then looked at Max, "but you, the so called Indestructible Man, you're putting too much faith in your own legend." He then looked at Sora and the others, "I don't know about the other Max Kildare you know, but this one here, he has a cult of personality growing around him."

"I hate that," said Max irately, "I'm not a god to be worshiped. The last thing I need is to have my own church! I'm just trying to do my job!"

"We all are," said Patricia, "I know. Look, Max, you've done all that you can for now. Everything at the museum is as ready as it can be. I'll handle our otherworldly guests, while you go rest up."

"I'm perfectly fine, Patty," said Max.

"No you're not," said Patricia, "you're a mess and you know it. I'm going to save us all a lot of time and energy by pulling rank." She looked at her watch, "there's a final meeting before the gala at 4:00 P.M. tomorrow, that'll give you well over sixteen hours to pull yourself together."

"I don't need to pull myself together," said Max stubbornly.

"Yes you do," said Patricia sternly, "I'm ordering you to stand down, Max Kildare! I don't want to see you up and about until the briefing tomorrow. That means no checking security, no training exercises, not even a jaunt down to Coney Island. I order you to get some rest!"

"I hate it when you pull rank," said Max, "it makes me question the validity of our friendship."

"You can hate her all you want," said Aaron, "but you still need time to recharge. As your physician, I'm also ordering you to stand down! Now get to it!"

Max wanted to retort, but then he relented and walked out of the room, "I'm probably so wound up I won't even be able to close my eyes," he muttered.

"He'll sleep alright," said Aaron, "I'll have room service bring up a little snack to help him calm down. He may be indestructible, but can never resist a free Bavarian Cream doughnut. I'll just spike the sugar coating with a little Lorazapan and he'll be out like a light."

"A prescription drug is enough to knock him out?" Riku asked.

"Max has been running on a knife edge for a year and a half now," said Leon in an annoyed tone, "Indestructible Man, my great granny's glass eye! He may be hard to kill but not immortal!"

"All Max needs is just to calm down and relax," said Laura, "then he'll sleep. But I sympathize with him a bit. He has reason to be so tense."

"We're all tense about The Necronomicon," said Leon. "The thieves couldn't have picked a worse time to steal it."

"The gala tomorrow," said Patricia, "December 21st, 2012."

"The Mayan Doomsday Prophecy," said Riku.

At that Patricia, Aaron, Laura, Leon and the others looked at Riku in confusion. "What are you talking about?" Leon asked.

"You know, the Mayan Doomsday Prophecy," said Sora.

"On our world, there's been a lot of panic and uncertainty about December 21st, 2012," said Tess, "some people think the Mayans foretold the end of the world. Some believe that an asteroid or a rogue planet will hit the world, others think we'll be cooked by solar flares."

"Some people think the magnetic poles will flip-flop," said Sora, "or the world will be ripped apart by a planet alignment or a galactic alignment."

"Oh, you must be talking about those nutcases we had a few years back," said Patricia, "well, let me put you younglings at ease. There is no Mayan Doomsday Prophecy."

"There was a brief scare a while back when a conspiracy group said that the Mayans foresaw the end of the world," said Laura, "while another group, whose leader believed she was in contact with aliens,

believed that 'Planet X' would pass by Earth and wreck all sorts of havoc."

"All of those doomsday theories and more were proven wrong as soon as they popped up in the media and online," said Aaron, "while the people propagating those rumors were denounced as either vicious liars seeking attention, black-hearted profiteers hoping to rip innocent people off or just down right crazy."

"What I'm worried about is that tomorrow is the Winter Solstice," said Leon, "the darkest night of the year, first day of winter, and a day and night when the mortal realm and the supernatural come closer, when the boundaries between realities are weakened. If anyone were to use the Necronomicon, it's effects would be amplified and who knows what would happen? I'll bet that's what worrying Max."

"I'm not talking about the cock-sucking book, you hillbilly prick!" snapped Laura, "you know what Max is so upset about! And if you've forgotten, then you really are an inbred mother fraker!" She then looked at Sora and the others, "I'm sorry for that outburst, I tend to swear when upset."

"To say the least," remarked an impressed Tess.

"The stress over The Necronomicon is agitating everyone's personal problems," said Aaron, "but with Max, it's worse. He's lost a lot of friends over the past few years and all that grief is beginning to catch up with him."

"Me and Max are the last of The Original Eight," said Leon, "the first group of Ramblers who got together in 1999 to prevent the end of the world."

"The Heatherson cult," said Riku, "who had their own copy of Necronomicon and used the Y2K Bug as a front for a demonic invasion."

"Yeah, that one was tough," said Leon, "and yet, after all that's happened, after all the times we've saved the world, after all the lives we've saved, we Meta Humans are still unknown to the general public. You'd think that if all those mortals knew about us and all the good we've done, we would have earned their trust. Or at least a bigger paycheck."

"How would you like a one way transfer to Siberia?" Patricia asked irately, "a few phone calls here, a few forms signed there and you'll be spending the rest of your life chasing after Frost Wyverns, rogue Yetis and other cold creatures. And do I need to remind you that those fleet feet of yours don't work so well in the snow?"

"You never have too," said Leon.

"Uh... weren't we talking about Max?" Malcolm asked.

"Oh, right," said Leon, "where was I? Oh, yeah, Max and I are the last of the Original Eight. Us, Andrew Carpenter, Jill Sparrow, Katina Jones, Kaylee Manfredi, Saul Gordon and Calvin Johnson. Eight ordinary kids with extraordinary powers. We stopped a doomsday cult from ending the world and fought other forms of evil since then.

"But being a Rambler means getting the worst, most dangerous assignments, and we don't always come back from them. Kaylee, Saul and Calvin were the first to go, then Katina went crazy for a while. She's recovering but may never return to active duty. And then..." he paused, as if his worlds were too painful to speak.

Patricia then finished for him, "and then we lost Andrew, and it tore Jill apart."

"Andrew's dead on this world?" Sora asked in a shocked tone.

"And it's my fault," said Laura in a tone that overflowed with her own guilt, "if I hadn't been such a stupid little bitch, none of it would have happened and Jill would still have Andrew!"

"It's not your fault, god-damn it!" snapped Patricia, "how many times do we have to tell you!?" she then looked at Sora and the others, "long story short, another cult tried to use Laura's Scanner powers to end the world. We stopped them, but not before Laura's powers went out of control. She ripped a hole in reality, a Thinny, which Andrew got pulled into."

"Couldn't you have gone after him?" Tess asked.

"No one has ever returned from the other side of a Thinny," said Patricia, "that is, no one has ever come back whole and sane. Those who return are either horrifically maimed and disfigured and die within minutes of their return. They're the lucky ones, while some are driven mad beyond all hope of reason and recovery. Those capable of coherent speech tell of a realm of living nightmares, of creatures so alien, so beyond mortal man's understanding that the mere sight of them are enough to induce insanity."

"And Andrew got pulled into that mouth of madness," said Laura, "if I only hadn't been showing off that night," she looked at our heroes, "it was my first High School prom, I was fifteen at the time. My best friend and I were having a good time, dancing and hoping to find a boyfriend before summer break started, and then the Queen B of the school, and by B I mean bitch, she pulled a horrible prank on my BFFL that scarred her down to her soul.

"I retaliated by using my powers to rip the Queen Bitch's dress to pieces. She clearly was hoping to get some after the dance, 'cause she was going commando. By using my power to humiliate my enemy, an even greater enemy was able to locate me. I was abducted, Jill, Andrew and the other Ramblers tried to save me, I lost control of my power and now Jill's a broken woman because of me."

"She must have really loved Andrew," said Sora.

"They were soul mates from the moment they met in 1999," said Patricia, "seriously, when they weren't on a mission or training, they were pretty much joined at the hip. Jill was devastated when we lost

Andrew. She couldn't stop crying for weeks and stayed locked in her apartment for almost a whole year.

"We finally convinced her to go see a psychiatrist, whom prescribed not anti-depressants but a trip around the world, a nice long, long holiday to clear her head. The Bureau put her on extended leave and funded her trip. She's been back to her native London and spent months at a time in Paris, Madrid, Rome, Venice, Vienna, Moscow, Jerusalem, Cairo, tramped around India for three months and walked the whole length of The Great Wall of China.

"She's been to Tokyo, Hawaii, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, backpacked across the Midwest and Southeast and spent nearly six months in Miami. But then last week she said she was making preparations to meet us here in New York City in time for the gala."

"That's one thing we're worried about," said Leon, "we're all glad that Jill's coming home, but we're not sure that she's okay in the head again. It's been five years since we lost Andrew, and I know that time heals all wounds, but some wounds run deep, real deep."

"Did Jill give any reason why she was coming back?" Malcolm asked, "or is this just some spontaneous change in her recovery?"

"All she said in her last email was that something incredible happened to her and she wanted to share it with everyone."

"Well, you can only hope that she is alright," said Sora.

"Ain't that a fact," said Laura. "Jill and Andrew were soul mates. Do you have idea what it's like to lose your soul mate? I should know, I've been reincarnated plenty of times to know what it is to lose your other half."

"Reincarnation aside, I think it's safe to say that regardless of Jill's mental condition," said Patricia in a placating manner, hoping to avoid a fight between Laura and Leon, "it's still too soon for her to

return to active duty. If she wants to share something with us, something that's making her happy again, then good for her."

"We're all hoping for Jill's recovery," said Laura.

"So am I," said Max as he walked back into the room, a serious look on his face, "But if Jill were here, she'd tell us to focus on the mission. He then looked at Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, "I don't know about the other Max Kildare you know, but me, I've got a saying that puts things into perspective; you want to kill each other, do it on your down damn time, the mission comes first."

"Our Max says that too," said Sora, "I think we're going to get along just fine."

"You might just be right," said Max.

"And that's how beautiful friendships start," said Patricia, "now, I think it's time I introduced our young friends to the rest of The Ramblers, at least the ones who'll be onsite during the gala."

"Wouldn't have it any other way," said Riku.

A short time later, Sora and the others met with the other Meta Humans whom would be attending the premier undercover. First there was Ken Somerset, age 24, medium height, short black hair, brown eyes and had the power to use his hands to cut through solid mater. Ken was capable of severing up to 10 feet of solid steel, hence earning him the nickname 'Blade-Fist.' Ken also had degrees in botany and geology.

Marcus 'Mark' Long, age 26, tall with short sandy blond hair and dark blue eyes. Mark had enhanced agility and senses that matched his two-sword fighting style. Before joining The Bureau a year ago, Mark's abilities allowed him to win several amateur motocross tournaments, while also bringing to justice wanted criminals and fugitives as a freelance bounty hunter.

J. Steven Austin, age 24, tall with short brown hair, light blue eyes and was well muscled. No matter how he was asked, he never told anyone what the J. stood for, preferring to be called Steven. Coming from generations of Kansas farmers, Steven was a man of few words, except when in the presence of a beautiful woman, turning him into a hopeless romantic that wound up rejected more often than not. Steven had the same healing factor as Max, only to a lesser degree, while where as Max preferred Mix Martial arts and a colt .45, Steven was a Kung Fu master and a deadly expert with pole arms.

And then there were three Meta Humans whom were exact doubles, albeit a few years younger or older, for people that Sora and the others knew from their earlier adventures.

Tyler Spartan, age 19, Aaron's younger brother, was the double for the Tyler Spartan whom fought with our heroes on Twilight Town and The World That Never Was. Tyler was a genius in metallurgy and electronics, responsible for creating newer, stronger body armor for the human BPRD agents, as well as developing his own suit of powered armor.

Julia 'Hawkeye' Eckhart, age 20, was the double for the Julia Eckhart whom was now one of the Neon Knights, twelve bodyguards for Miley Stewart, AKA Hannah Montana. Whereas the Julia that Sora and the others knew was from Australia and a master of Muay Thai martial arts, this Julia was from Vermont and was a crack shot sniper, preferring a modified lever-action Winchester riffle and a pair of spring-loaded 9mm pistols on her forearms. One thing that the two Julia's shared was a hook-shaped scar below their left eye that resulted from a propane tank explosion, but where as the other Julia's scar was triggered by an ill-timed soccer ball kick, this Julia's was caused by an ill-timed baseball throw.

The Felicia Valentine of this world and the one Sora knew, whom was also a Neon Knight, shared the nickname 'The Butcher of Boston.' The other Felicia was a master of Eskrima, Pilipino stick fighting and also an expert knife user, while this Felicia was a pure knife fighter and a competent slight of hand magician. She had over

a dozen throwing and fighting knives hidden in her clothes and hair, while hinting of more in places Sora and the others would never have guessed.

"So, the other me is a bodyguard for a pop superstar?" Felicia asked.

"And mine's from Australia?" Julia asked.

"That's not all," said Tess, "The Bureau that we know, they had a Julia and a Felicia too, and they had the same abilities and fighting styles."

"How cool is that?" a grinning Julia asked.

"And they were lovers," said Tess.

At that Julia and Felicia looked at each other for a second before shuddering and averting their eyes, "no freaking way!" said Felicia irately.

"The other, other me must be out of her damn mind!" said Julia, "I for one have a boyfriend, and a mortal boyfriend at that."

"Same with me," said Felicia, "and strange enough, he's okay that I'm a knife-happy psychopath."

"Oh come on, Fey-Fey," said Mark, "you're no psychopath."

At that Felicia whipped out a knife and brandished it in front of Mark's nose, "call me that one more time and I'll skin you alive! I don't like being called that!"

"What? Fey-Fey?" Mark asked in a teasing manner.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that, man!" said Tyler, "she'll have you gutted and stuffed as a trophy!"

"Retribution," said Steven.

But Felicia then vanished her knife, "I'll save it for later. Right now I got to pick up my outfit for the gala."

"And what are you going to wear, Julia?" Laura asked.

"Nothing as outrageous as what Felicia's planning," said Julia, "I'll be serving Champaign among the guests."

"And I'll be masquerading as part of the food service staff," said Mark. He then pretended he was serving fancy party snacks, "canapés?" he asked in a professional manner.

"I never liked chopped liver," said Riku.

"Are you kidding? It's great," said Malcolm, "especially with caviar, and not just any fish eggs."

"Ever noodle a catfish?" Steven asked abruptly.

"Did I ever what?" Malcolm asked.

"Catfish noodling," said Steven, "it's when you wade into the river, find a nice soft spot in the riverbed, dig your hand into the muck, wiggle your fingers around and when the catfish thinks your fingers are food and bite your hand, you just yank the fish out of the water and sock it to him good!" he then mimed throwing a punch, "whammo!"

"Thanks," said Riku in a slightly uncomfortable manner, "but I'll stick to regular fishing."

"Me too," said Sora as he unconsciously rubbed his hands.

"Now hold on, this sounds interesting," said Malcolm.

"My hands are too precious to risk them getting bitten off by a catfish," said Tess.

Malcolm was about to retort, when he felt a spark of magic pass through him. This spark was a signal he had set up to let him know when Merida had sent him a letter via their enchanted writing desks, "is there some place where I can have a few moments of privacy? It's important."

Patricia then pointed to an unused office that had a door that can be locked, "take all the time you need, but don't dawdle too long. We've got to get you fitted for a tuxedo."

"Lucky me," said Malcolm sarcastically. He then went into the office, locked the door and sat at a nearby desk. He then called in his enchanted writing desk and read Merida's letter.

Dear Malcolm.

Ah'm so sorry ah haven't been sending ye more letters, things have been absolutely mad here at Dunbroch.

The night after yer last letter, a star fell to earth near the castle. Can ye believe it? A falling star that fell right over me head? Alright, it wasn't over me head, but it came pretty close. It actually fell during the day. Ah was out riding Angus, when this big bloomin' fireball streaked overhead, nearly scarred me and Angus to death. There was a flash of light and a big booming sound and the whole ground shook like an earthquake.

After all the trembling was done, and ah calmed Angus down, I rode over to the fallen star. It dug this enormous hole in the ground and the whole place was so hot I couldn't get close to the fallen star. By then me dad, mum, brothers and the young lords had ridden out to see what all the commotion was.

Dad told me that it was no star but Sky Iron, and it's true! When the thing cooled down enough to get close, I saw that it was just a big hunk of iron, about the size of me arm's length and width, and very heavy. It took ten men to lift the thing out of its hole.

But then, of all people to show up, the old witch did. She saw the falling star and knew that it was important. She also knew that me old sword was now a useless piece of rust, so she said that the Sky Iron could be forged into a new sword for me.

This wouldn't be any sword, but one that she would infuse with a bit of magic, making it better than any sword in the land, something that could slay even a monster as vile and vicious as Mor'du. The witch also said that after the sword was made, there'd be some Sky Iron leftover to make a few special arrowheads, just because she could. And all the witch asked as payment was a contract with me dad and mum. The witch would get exclusive selling rights to the four clans for all of her woodcarvings. Everyone thought it was a good deal and me new sword and arrowheads should be finished in a fortnight.

Ah'm so sorry that things got to out of control for you at Hogwarts, especially the part where ye and yer friends had to give up yer memories. Ah don't think ah could have done the same thing ye could have, but ah'm glad things worked out as well as they did. Can ye imagine a horrible person like that Regina and that Dio Brando, having such powerful magic in their hands? Not a pleasant picture.

Ah'll try to write more often but for now it could be a while. Things are happening in the kingdom that are too complicated to put to paper. When ah get the chance, ah'll tell ye all about them.

For now, know that ah've been thinking of ye and always will. With much love and light,

Merida of Dunbroch.

Malcolm sat back and smiled, glad that Merida was alright, and was on her way to a new, better sword. He took a moment to think of a reply, then began telling Merida about what happened after his last letter, how he, Sora, Riku and Tess chased Kairi into this strange, alternate world full of alternate versions of people they knew.

It's strange, so many familiar faces, with so many of them nearly alike the ones we know. Yet the differences are what make these people special. They've sacrificed so much for their world, endured horrors beyond description and heartache that would break a normal spirit.

I'm convinced that if we can just get to Kairi, we can heal whatever damage was done to her mind. You really had to be there to know how freaked out she was when she saw Sora. I haven't told Sora and the others yet, but I've the horrible feeling that dark magic is involved, but I'll hold my silence until I know for sure. Horrible accidents have happened when you use magic foolishly, as you no doubt know, no offense intended.

I know it sounds selfish that I think that we should be looking for Kairi instead of babysitting a dusty old book. But this isn't any old book. This is The Necronomicon. This is pure dark magic that, in the wrong hands, can lead to unparallel chaos and death. As a Keyblade Wielder, I cannot stand by and let a threat to steal the book be carried out. I have to do my part to keep it safe, as does Sora, Riku and Tess, and if Kairi were here, she'd feel the same.

So, I'll do what I have to do to protect The Necronomicon, though I agree wholeheartedly with Max and the others that the book should be destroyed, it's too dangerous for the world. Whoever the bastard is who wanted the book so badly can rot in hell for all I care. The book should have been destroyed, that's my opinion.

I'd better wrap things up before they drag me off to wear whatever costume this tuxedo is supposed to be. All my love to your family and to you, and know that for every day we're apart, brings us one day closer to when we meet again.

Malcolm.

Just as he had finished the letter and cast a spell to send it across time and space to The Highlands, Malcolm heard the office door

open and Riku sticking his head into the room, "come on, let's get fitted."

"I don't understand, what's the big deal about this tuxedo?" Malcolm asked as he stood up and went with Riku out of the room, "I've never even heard of it before."

"It's just a fancy way of getting dressed up for a shindig," said Riku, "at least it's relatively cheep. Now with girls, they like to spend as much money as they can get away with it for an outfit that they'll wear once and most likely forget as soon as they see something else they like."

"And I thought my life was complicated," said Malcolm.

... Monster High...

"And that's what happened, Headmistress," said Frankie. She, Cleo, Lagoona and Draculaura stood with Kairi in the office of Ester Bloodgood, the Headless Headmistress of Monster High. Kairi's new friends had just spent the last ten minutes telling Headmistress Bloodgood about Kairi's sudden arrival.

The headmistress was an imposing woman despite her slight frame, tall with short black hair and silver eyes and pale skin, wearing long purple trench coat with buttons that resembles a cape, a red tie and a white long sleeved frilly shirt underneath, black pants, and black riding boots. She also wore dark purple-red lip gloss and purple eyeshadow. The fact that her head was sitting on the desk, while her body was in her chair, both fully alive, only disturbed Kairi the slightest.

"I must say," remarked Headmistress Bloodgood, speaking in a cultured, deep toned voice as she looked up at Kairi, "you are quite the conundrum, young Keyblade Wielder."

"You know about Keyblades?" Kairi asked.

"What's a Keyblade?" Lagoon asked.

"And is it trendy?" Cleo asked, "a girl of my nobility must be at the head of all fashion trends."

"I don't think this counts as an accessory," said Kairi. She then took a step back and summoned her Keyblade.

"Great barnacles!" exclaimed Lagoon, while Cleo, Draculaura were speechless, while Frankie's neck bolts gave off sparks of surprise.

"Yeah, I get that reaction a lot," said Kairi.

"Oh, now I know what that is," said Draculaura, "I remember hearing a lot about those things. You fight Heartless with a Keyblade, right?"

"Yeah," said Kairi, "you know about Heartless?"

"I helped fight them a few times," said Draculaura, "I may look young and perky, but I'm over 1,600 years old. I've taken a stand more than once against the darkness."

"My family has always stood against the darkness," said Cleo in a smug tone.

"Well, I may still be new to the world," said Frankie, "but if any dark things tried to push me around," her neck bolts sparked again, "I'd give them a shock to their system!"

"I'd just kick 'em in the bum," said Lagoon.

"May I?" Headmistress Bloodgood asked as her body stood up from her desk and walked over. Feeling slightly uncomfortable at the sight of the headless body, Kairi handed her Keyblade over.

"Fantastic craftsmanship," said Bloodgood as her body examined the Keyblade, "perfect balance and it hardly weighs a thing. Is it true that a Keyblade can never be truly separated from its chosen wielder?"

Kairi answered by making her Keyblade vanish from Bloodgood's hands, only to reappear in her hand.

"Superb!" said an astonished Bloodgood, "this certainly brings back memories."

"What memories, Headmistress?" Draculaura asked.

"I wasn't always an educator," said Bloodgood as her body walked over to the desk and picked up her head and placed it on her body, "in my youth, back when I was still hale and whole, I was quite the adventurer, isn't that right, Nightmare?"

She was referring to a nearby large, blue female horse with a purple mane and tail and red eyes, with a purple saddle marked with a skull that had a purple bow on it, the emblem of Monster High. Nightmare was happily munching on some oats and neighed in response to Bloodgood's question.

"But now isn't the time to reminisce on my exploits," said Bloodgood, "needless to say, I have encountered Keyblade Wielders before. But what should be discussed," she then walked up to Kairi, "is why are you here? The Keyhole for this world was sealed long ago. There are only rare, mild outbreaks of Heartless that are easily dealt with by The Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense."

Kairi was hesitant to tell the Headmistress of her woes, but there was something about Bloodgood, something about her tough but fair, strict but understanding aura that made Kairi want to trust her.

And so she told Bloodgood, Frankie and the others about Sora and the other Keyblade Wielders, summarizing all their adventures, their triumphs, tragedies and romance with Sora. But then she told them about how Sora was killed by a tentacle monster that took his face and how Riku and the others were turned into zombies.

"And now this thing is after me," said Kairi in a miserable, defeated tone, her eyes brimming with tears, "that thing with Sora's face, and

all my friends were turned into mindless zombies!"

"I beg your pardon!" snapped Cleo in an offended tone, "one of my best friends and closest confidant is a zombie and she is the smartest ghoul in school!"

"Zombies aren't really mindless, love," said Lagoona, "they just think slower than we do, real slow."

"And they really don't eat people that much," said Draculaura, "not since they found a means of curing them of their hunger, long story."

"Well, these zombies want to tear me to pieces," said Kairi as she took a handkerchief from Bloodgood and used it to wipe her eyes, "and before you ask why I didn't fight back, I couldn't. I... I just couldn't. Well, I did fight back, but I got so scared, I ran away, and here I am."

"That's nothing to be ashamed of," said Frankie, "I mean, if my friends turned into cold-blooded killers and were after me, I don't think I could fight back against them."

"It's not that," said Kairi, "if one or several of my friends were turned into the walking dead, I'd put them out of their misery. They'd want me to do it and I'd want them to destroy me if I was turned. But... but that tentacle creature, I was so frightened of it, all I could think was run away and run away fast."

"I admit that I've never heard of this species of Monster," said Bloodgood, "and I am familiar with nearly every species in the world; from vampires to werewolves, from mummies to zombies, from sea and fresh water dwellers to gargoyles, from elementals to ghosts, from yetis to robots, but I have never heard of a tentacle creature that stole the faces of its victims."

"Maybe Ghoulia would know," said Cleo as she pulled out a cell phone shaped like a coffin and began typing a text message, "I'll ask her."

"In the meantime," said Frankie as she pulled out her coffin-shaped cell phone, "I think it'd be a good idea if we all got together for Kairi. I'll ask Clawdeen and Abbey to meet up with us."

"I'll see if Gill's available," said Lagoona.

"I know Clawd will come and help," said Draculaura, "wait, what are we helping with again?"

"With keeping Kairi safe from the face stealer," said Frankie.

"We are?" Cleo and Lagoona asked at the same time.

"Well of course we are," said Frankie, "she may have just got here, but Kairi's our friend and there no way I'll let some face-stealing jerk make her miserable. If that thing wants Kairi, it'll have to tear me apart!" she then mimed throwing a punch, only to have the stitches connecting her right hand to her forearm come undone and send her hand flying across the room, knocking a clearly fragile vase off of the top of a bookshelf. Fortunately, Bloodgood anticipated this and caught the vase in time.

"Oops," said Frankie in a sheepish tone, "sorry, I kinda fall to pieces sometimes." Her hand then walked on its fingers back over to her and she stitched it back in place, "there, good as new."

"I appreciate the offer of helping me," said Kairi, "but it's really not necessary. This is my problem and I don't want you to get hurt because of my misfortune."

"Nonsense," said Lagoona, "we've dealt with nasties before."

"And we're not so delicate as to run away at the first sign of trouble," Draculaura.

"We have powers," said Cleo, "as do our respective boyfriends, jealous much?"

"I've yet to make an impression on your powers," said Kairi, "though I would like to meet your friends and boyfriends."

"Then there's no time to wait!" said Draculaura happily. She then grabbed Kair's hands and lead her out of Bloodgood's office, "come on!"

"Keep an eye on young Kairi, Frankie," said Bloodgood, "You and your friends. Kairi has much strength in her heart, but I fear that she's in a fragile state. If pushed too far, her fears and doubts could destroy her."

"We'll take care of Kairi, Headmistress," said Frankie as she smiled confidently, "leave it to us."

"I believe that," said Bloodgood, "now, if you'll excuse me, I have some phone calls to make."

"You can count on us," said Frankie as she gave Bloodgood the thumbs up. At that Cleo and Lagoon nodded in agreement, then the three of them left the headmistress' office.

Once alone, Bloodgood sat back in her chair again, "that girl is in good hands," she then looked towards her beloved horse, "but I fear that her troubles are only just beginning, Nightmare. Young Kairi may have nothing put light and good intentions in her heart, but nevertheless, she is a Keyblade Wielder, and wherever a Keyblade Wielder goes, trouble is sure to follow."

At that Nightmare walked up to her mistress and bent down for Bloodgood to stroke her nose, "but still," said Bloodgood, "even in the darkest of times, there's still hope."

She then pulled out from her desk an old address book, "but that doesn't mean we cannot use all the help we can get." she then picked up her phone and dialed a number. After two rings someone picked up on the other end, "yes... it's me... I need a favor..."

A short time later found Kairi being introduced to several more of Frankie's friends at Monster High.

Clawdeen Wolf was a confident, energetic and fearless lycanthrope with dreams of being a world renowned fashion designer. Being a werewolf, Clawdeen was naturally loyal and protective of those she loved and would go to any lengths to stand up for her friends and family. Clawdeen was tall and athletic with brown fur and long, flowing, curly brown hair with hazel-yellow eyes, her red lips betraying a hint of fangs and her hands ended in stylized claws.

She wore a peach sparkly tank top with black tiger stripes and a purple miniskirt with a studded belt. She also had an open black jacket with ribbed sleeves and hem, and a furry purple collar. She wore peach colored long socks with toe holes. Her shoes were black and purple strappy platform sandal boots with peep toes. She also wore a choker necklace similar to her black studded belt and another necklace with a purple gem.

Abbey Bominable was a yeti transfer student who spoke with a thick Russian accent. Growing up in the frozen wastes of the Himalayas gave Abbey an almost Spartan cold-hearted personality, but that was only skin deep. Underneath her icy exterior, not to mention the power to summon and control ice, beat a warm and loving heart. She sometimes had trouble telling when someone was being sarcastic and was often headstrong, Abbey was never one to run away from a challenge and was ready to do the right thing, no matter what. Abbey had light blue skin that glittered under the right light. She had light purple eyes and long white hair with pink, purple and blue streaks set with a fur-lined hair band, while a pair of small, sharp tusks protruded from her lips.

She wore a dress with pink, purple, black and light blue patterns, meant to look like ice reflecting through light, tied around with a string that connected to a black purse at her side, and sparkly stockings that faded from bright pink to blue. The dress had white fur trimmings across the top, with a similar design along the arm, and legwarmers over platform high hiking boots. Her hair was pulled

back by a furry headband, and she accessorized with mismatched earrings shaped like a purple snowflake and a blue icicle, complete with an enchanted ice crystal necklace that allowed her to survive in warm environments.

Then there was Ghoulia Yelps, the smartest student at Monster High, despite her being a zombie. Regardless of being among the walking dead, which caused her to move with an awkward, bent back and slow pace and could speak only in moans and grunts, she was highly clever and sophisticated, while her friends, with Cleo being her best friend and closest confident, often sacrificing much of her time and energies to helping Cleo's often selfish activities, easily understood her zombie speech. She was timid and shy, preferring to keep her nose in a book or at her computer, dedicating herself to the advancement of science, though she was not afraid to lend her talents to help out her friends and fellow students.

Ghoulia had pale gray skin, long hair in various shades of blue set with a green hair band and wore 'cat-eye' horn-rimmed glasses in front of her deep blue eyes. She wore a black, red and white striped off-the-shoulder shirt with elbow-length sleeves under a white camisole with a cherry pattern and red trim, as well as fishnet sleeves under her shirt that wrapped around her hands. She had a black and white piano belt with a square Monster High symbol belt buckle, which she wore with dotted red pants and tie style knee-high heel boots, as well as a pink tab necklace and pink zipper earrings..

"I can say this, ghoul friend," said Clawdeen, speaking in a Brooklyn accent, as she walked around Kairi, "you have fantastic looks! I am so loving that shade of red," she pointed to Kairi's hair, "all of you is just begging to be a model."

"You really think so?" Kairi asked hesitantly.

"I know so," said Clawdeen, "I can see you now, strutting down the catwalk, camera flashes all around and the crowd cheering their hearts out."

Ghoulia then moaned something as she pulled out a sketchpad and began drawing.

"Ghoulia's right," said Cleo, "Kairi would make a better art model," she then gently touched Kairi's face and tilted her head up and to the left, "she's just begging to be immortalized on paper."

"These Heartless you speak of," said Abbey, speaking in broken English signifying that it was a second language to her, "they don't sound tough."

"A lot of them are easy to beat," said Kairi, "mostly because I've gotten so good with my Keyblade. But there are some that are so strong, they'd flatten you in a second if you give them the chance."

"Then I won't give them chance!" said Abbey, "I'll give Heartless cold awakening they never forget."

"Aren't we forgetting something?" Dracularua asked, "Headmistress Bloodgood said that our world has very rare Heartless attacks and they're all handled by The Bureau."

"What Bureau?" Clawdeen asked, "I never even heard of Heartless until now."

Ghoulia then moaned something as she put her sketchpad down, pulled out a laptop and began typing.

"She's looking up 'Heartless' and 'The Bureau' online," said Lagoona.

"Can you really understand her?" Kairi asked. She then looked at Ghoulia, "no offense."

Ghoulia then moaned something that could be interpreted as 'none taken,' as she blinked one eye, then the other.

"We've been around her enough to understand her heart," said Clawdeen, "and 'zombish' isn't that hard to understand."

Ghoulia then pulled out her coffin-like cell phone and activated a translation app. Her next moan was then translated as, 'and there is always this,' she then moaned again, 'but it cannot express emotion,' another moan, 'yet.'

"Ghoulia has made some rather mad inventions," said Lagoona, "and used that noggin of hers to really get things done."

"This one time she figured out how to knock out an entire opposing doge ball team with just one throw," said Frankie.

"And she figured out to link a FrightTube video to the school's homepage," said Dracularua, "so that it could be forwarded to the entire contact list of anyone who clicked on it."

Ghoulia then moaned something as she continued to type on her laptop.

"Oh, don't be so modest, Ghoulia," Cleo, "I would have been so lost without you."

"It's true," said Clawdeen. She then pointed at Cleo, "this ghoul here, she has no origination skills whatsoever."

"And she helped Cleo plan our Fearleading routines," said Draculaura.

"And is always there to listen and give a shoulder to cry on if needed," said Frankie.

"Sounds like you've got a lot of weight to carry," said Kairi to Ghoulia, whom then moaned in replay.

"She manages," said Cleo.

Ghoulia then grunted in frustration as glared irately at the laptop screen.

"Nothing about The Heartless online?" Lagoona asked.

Ghoulia moaned as she showed everyone the search engine page.

"Oh, there's plenty about The Heartless online," said Frankie, "And The Bureau."

"But it's all rumors and urban legends," said Cleo as she read the descriptions of the websites on the search engine page, "and quite a lot of them are conspiracy theory sites."

"Oh! Do you think the government is covering up the truth?" Dracularua asked eagerly, "or maybe it's a prelude to an alien invasion!"

"Oh, please," said Frankie, "there's no such thing as aliens. Even I know that."

"You'd be surprised," said Kairi.

Just then Clawdeen sniffed the air and frowned with annoyed concern, "uh oh, here comes bad news on six legs."

At that Kairi tensed up slightly. In the short time since she woke up in the nurses' office, she had seen more different types of monsters than she had in her life, and all of them were teenagers, students of the school. Most of them were humanoid, just with different colored skin, more appendages, more eyes, less eyes, some with fur, some with fangs and claws, some with tentacles, friendly tentacles that is, and some that were so inhuman they were pretty much indescribable.

Kairi then saw three girls approaching that had an attitude of born troublemakers. They were werecats, lean, graceful and an overall bad attitude.

"Toralei Stripe and her minions," said Dracularua to Kairi, "Purrsephone and Meowlody."

"Three of Monster High's finest," said Cleo in a sarcastic tone.

"More like finest troublemakers," said Lagoon.

Toralei was definitely cat-like, self-assured with just a hint of sarcasm. She was an opportunist and manipulator, used to having her own way regardless of the consequences. She had orange fur that was a few shades darker around her left eye, with dark orange tiger-stripes on her arms, legs and a few on her face, green eyes and an 'emo' hairstyle.

She wore a sleeveless red dress with diagonal black and white stripes, combined with a short, black leather jacket with studded collar and red lining, and a pair of black torn pants. She sported mismatched red gloves, the one on the right being a plain glove only covering the index finger and the thumb, the one on the left being a full glove sporting silver studs and a back-hole. Around her neck was an orange scarf with a skull mark and a golden belt with silver buckle and with the skull imprint loosely secured around her waist. She wore three piercings in her ears along with a silver stud in each and a silver ring in her left ear. She had black converse wedges with red heels, open toes, red shoelaces, and silver ankle-studs.

Toralei's loyal minions, the werecat twins, had identical gray and white striped fur, with Purrsephoney having black hair and Meowlody with white hair. They both wore sleeveless, tiger print shirts in horizontal white and black combined with a crimson skirt and a red, sleeveless jacket and crimson wedge heels, bootlaces over the entire length, buckles at the top, and open toes.

"Well, well, well," said Toralei as she stood there in the hall a few paces away from Frankie and the others, "if it isn't everyone's favorite Fearleaders and their cronies. Enjoying yourselves?"

"We were before you showed up," said Clawdeen in an annoyed tone as she glared irately at the tiger-striped werecat. "Don't you have anything better to do than ruining our day?"

"The things I could do with my time if I didn't have you ghouls to torment scheduled in," said Toralei, "and speaking of which,

Clawdeen, either I need glasses, or have you changed fur conditioners? Your hair looks fantastic today."

"Huh? You really think so?" a confused Clawdeen asked as she ran her clawed hand through her brown locks.

"Oh, my mistake," said Toralei as she sniffed the air, "it's flea dip!" at that she and her twin minions laughed cruelly.

"Flea dip!?" growled Clawdeen as she bared her full fangs, "why... I oughta!" she then reached to rip Toralei apart, growling fiercely, while Toralei and her minions bared their claws and hissed.

"No, don't fight!" exclaimed Draculaura as she and Abbey grabbed Clawdeen, "she's not worth it!"

"Let me go!" shouted Clawdeen as she struggled to free herself from her friend's grip, "I'll burry her alive!"

"You dig grave for cat girl, you dig one for yourself," said Abbey.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Ghoulia's right," said Frankie, "you touch Toralei and you'll risk suspension, or worse."

"It'd be worth it to take Toralei down a notch," said Clawdeen, "it'll make me feel better!"

"The only notches you'll get will be grooves on your face," said Toralei as she brandished her claws, while Purrsephone and Meowlody meowed in a taunting manner.

"Keep talking, Toralei!" snapped Clawdeen, "and we'll find out once and for all just how many ways you can skin a cat!"

"Oh, I'm so scared!" said Toralei in a mock frightened tone, "I think I just lost one of my lives!" at that she and her twin minions laughed cruelly.

"Oh go chase some yarn!" snapped Kairi.

At that Toralei and her minions looked at Kairi as if they had just realized that she was there. "Who's the new Normie?" she asked in a genuinely curious tone.

"A friend," said Abbey in a defensive tone, "got problem?"

"No," said Toralei as she slinked over and walked around Kairi as if examining her, "I just want to get to know her."

"Well, get this," said Kairi as she irately crossed her arms, "I don't like bullies. And before you try anything, I'm not a student here, so I can kick your ass any time you're ready."

"You'll find that I'm more trouble than I'm worth," said Toralei as she pulled out one of her hairs and split it on one of her claws, "you mess with this kitty cat at your own risk."

At that Frankie's neck bolts sparked as a look of annoyed anger fell on her face. But then she took a calming breath and walked up to Toralei, "can I talk to you for a second? In private?"

At that Toralei, Clawdeen, Abbey and the other Monsters were slightly taken aback.

"You want to talk to me?" Toralei asked, "you, Frankie Stein, want to use your precious time in conversation with little old me?"

"I'll make it worth your while," said Frankie in a serious tone, "a few minutes of your time, without your loyal slaves."

At that Toralei looked at Frankie suspiciously, but then agreed, "alright, five minutes," she then looked at her sidekicks, "Purrsephone, Meowlody, stay." With that she and Frankie walked down the hallway until they were out of earshot.

"Okay," said Frankie, "you see Kairi over there?" she pointed back to her friends and Kairi, "she's had a really rough time recently and

we're all trying to help her out."

"Oh, so she's the Normie who fell out of the air and onto you," said Toralei in a mischievous tone, "how *purrfectly* interesting."

"I'll give you \$500 to leave her alone," said Frankie in a matter of fact tone.

At that Toralei blinked in shock, "excuse me? You're..."

"You heard me, Toralei Stripe," said Frankie, "a \$500 prepaid debit card, and it'll be all yours once Kairi's gone on her way, which may be a couple of days, could be weeks, we really don't know yet. The point is, you give me your pledge to leave Kairi alone, to be civil, polite and overall cordial to her, to not tease, insult or play any pranks on, and you'll receive the card."

Toralei then looked at Frankie suspiciously as she crossed her arms, "and when did you ever have \$500 prepaid card you can just give away?"

"I'm not giving it to you," said Frankie, "I'm buying something with it. I'm buying your trust to do the right thing. And I've been saving it for a while so I can... get something personal."

"And just what would that be?" Toralei asked, "thinking about a gift for you know who?"

"What I do with my money and gift cards is my business," said Frankie, "and I'm willing to use it to make a deal. You leave Kairi alone for however long she's here with us, and you'll get the gift card. Bother her in the slightest and you get nothing."

"How do I know you even have this prepaid card?" Toralei asked.

"I'm afraid you'll just have to trust me," said Frankie, "just like I'll have to trust you, even though we really haven't had much reason to trust

each other in recent times. So, do we have a deal?" With that she held out her right hand.

Toralei hesitated for a few seconds before holding out her right hand, "deal," she said. She then spat into her right palm, while Frankie did the same and the two shook on it.

Toralei then walked over to Purrsephony and Meowlody, "let's go," she said to her minions, and the three of them walked away, but not before she had a few more words to say.

"Enjoy your visit here, Kairi, and watch yourself. Not all Monsters are as welcoming and understanding as Frankie and her friends." With that she left the area.

"That pussycat is one bad apple," Lagoon.

"In home village," said Abbey, "those who enjoy hurting others are punished by chaining to mountain side."

"That doesn't sound so bad," said Cleo, "you could at least throw in a curse or two."

"They are chained for week," said Abbey, "naked with full body shave."

"Oh my Ra," said Cleo as she gave an involuntary shiver, "that's so cold."

"I'd rather just have Toralei and her groupies leave us alone," said Clawdeen.

"Why do we even talk to her?" Draculaura asked, "what's to stop us from totally ignoring Toralei for the rest of her nine lives?"

"Because that would go against what Monster High is all about," said Frankie, she then looked at Kairi, "this school is the only place in the world where Monsters can come together and truly be themselves,

where former bitter enemies become friends, were tolerance and understanding are the words."

"It's true," said Clawdeen, "my older brother Clawd, he and Draculaura are pretty much joined at the hip."

"We're a match made in heaven," said Dracularua as she sighed with happiness.

"Well," said Kairi, "one thing is for sure; this is probably the only place in existence where so many different people could have gotten together and become friends."

At that Ghoulia moaned something in the form of a question.

"She wants to know just how far have you traveled to know so much," said Lagoona.

"Quite a long way, actually," said Kairi.

Just then Cleo's coffin-like cell phone rang. She then frowned at the caller ID, "Anubis-damn it! It's my evil, evil sister!" she then answered the call, "yes, Nefera? What manner of torment are you going to inflict on me today?" She then listened and was silent for a few seconds, "no," she said as her eyes widened in surprise, "no! Oh my Ra! You cannot be serious!" she then walked away and held one finger to her free ear, "what happened!?"

"It's either really bad news," said Draculaura, "or really, really good news."

"Any news from Nefera de Nile is bad news," said Clawdeen. She then looked Kairi, "Cleo's big sister is one seriously spoiled, rotten rimes with witch."

"Nefera would crush you in an instant if it would make her star shine brighter," said Lagoona.

"Older mummy girl is nothing but spotlight-seeking diva," said Abbey, "no heart, not where it count."

"She can't be that bad," said Kairi.

"She did a hostile takeover of the Fearleading team," said Clawdeen, "we were just about ready for Mashionals when Nefera butted in and ruined things for us, all so she could take the credit."

"And she likes nothing better than to make Cleo miserable," said Dracularua.

Just then they all heard Cleo say happily, "why, of course I'll do it, Nefera! I would be honored to represent our family in New York. But are you sure that Father cannot be there? He has been planning this event for over a year... an emergency corporate meeting in London?... out all week? And you'll be at a job interview in Milan? Then I shall do my duty as a daughter of the house of de Nile and represent our family on this momentous occasion. Just one thing... I can take only four friend with me? Why not... oh, very well, four... of course I'm happy, this is the nicest thing you've ever done for me, so what's the catch?... No catch?... why does that not set me at ease?... of course I'll still go, and yes, I will have a great time. Thank you, big sister, you're now at the top of my favorite sibling list again!" with a that she hung up her phone.

"You only have one sibling," said Clawdeen.

"And now Nefera's my favorite again!" said Cleo happily as she walked back over, a bright smile on her face, "ghouls friends! Wondrous news! I have been chosen to represent my family at a grand gala in New York City!"

"The Big Apple?" Draculaura asked eager, "I've never been there before."

"Seriously?" Lagoona asked, "Crikey, you're like 1,600 years old and you've never been to New York?"

"I never got around to it," said Draculaura.

"In which case you'll come with me!" said Cleo, "you, Ghoulia, Clawd and of course, Deuce, shall join me at this grand event in which a priceless piece of world history shall be unveiled to the public!"

"Whoa, wait a second!" said Clawdeen, "how come you only picked four people?"

"And just what is going on?" Frankie asked.

"Oh, forgive me, I was caught up in the moment," said Cleo, "my father, Ramses de Nile, The Great Pharaoh, has been planning a grand unveiling of a priceless historical artifact at The American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. The event has been in the making for months and he was so looking forward to being there for the unveiling, but he was called away to an emergency business meeting and won't be back in time for the event tomorrow night, and neither will my sister. So, the duty of representing the family falls on my noble shoulders."

"And such broad shoulders they are," teased Lagoona, "they'd carry any burden."

"I choose to ignore that remark," said Cleo, "for this is a prime chance for me to radiate as the star that I am!"

"But how come you chose my brother, Draculaura, Deuce and Ghoulia over the rest of us?" Clawdeen asked.

"Simple," said Cleo, "I know you ghouls. Clawdeen, do you want to go to New York?"

"Uh, well, actually," said Clawdeen, "not really no, not tomorrow night that is."

"Me neither," said Lagoona. At that Frankie and Abbey shook their heads.

"Then there is no question about it," said Cleo, "tonight we shall board one of my family's private jets to The Big Apple, and the following night, we shall dominate New York City!"

"Um... I don't mean to burst your dreams of fame and glory," said Kairi, "but maybe going to The Big City isn't such a good idea."

"Huh? Why ever not?" Cleo asked.

"Well," said Kairi, "I honestly don't know how well relationships are between humans and Monsters are as a whole, but..."

"Oh, I get it," said Frankie, "you're worried about upsetting the Normies."

"We do kinda stand out in a crowd," said Draculaura in a depressed tone, "I should have known that it was too good to be true! I guess I can say goodbye to my dream of seeing New York."

"Of course you're going to see the city," said Cleo in an insisting tone, "we'll... just... try not to attract so much attention, I mean... how big of a fuss can five young and attractive Monsters make in New York?"

"Well, considering that this is The Big Apple that we're talking about," said Clawdeen, "quite a lot."

"I'm sorry I brought it up," said Kairi, "but I'm concerned that you might get in trouble."

"She's right," said Lagoona, "we may have changed a lot of minds and hearts in town, but in a big city like New York, we'd draw an angry mob faster than a school of sharks after a drop of blood."

"That's still no reason to not go," said Cleo, "I'm going."

"Well, you don't stand out too much from Normies," said Frankie, "and I mean that in a good way."

"Among ghoul friends," said Abbey, "you look most human."

"Well, what can I say," remarked Cleo in a smug manner, "if I have to pass for a Normie, I can do it in grand style. But there must be a way for you to come, Dracularua."

Just then Ghoulia moaned something eagerly.

"She says she has an idea," said Clawdeen, "and to meet us in one of the classrooms in thirty minutes."

Ghoulia then moaned something else then hurried as fast as her undead body could move down the hallway, which was pretty fast for a zombie.

"She also said to bring the boys too," said Dracularua.

"What was that all about?" Kairi asked.

"I'm not entirely sure," said Cleo, "but when Ghoulia has an idea, it's usually a brilliant idea."

"She really is a genius," said Frankie.

Just then, from out of nowhere, came a camera flash and click, which came from a coffin-like cell phone that, at first to Kairi's eyes, was hovering in midair. She then realized that the phone was held by a semi-transparent arm that was connected to the wall.

Kairi then heard an girls voice that was almost like an ethereal whisper, "What a scoop!"

"Spectra!" snapped Frankie, "you get out here right now and delete that photo!"

"Oh, give her a break, Frankie," said Draculaura, "things have been really quiet at school all week. Spectra needs a gory story for her blog."

"I know that, but not Kairi," said Frankie in an insisting tone, "she's been through enough. The last thing she needs is to be talked about by everyone."

"I'm not that fragile," said Kairi, "if the school paper wants to do a story on me, I'll give an interview."

Just then a ghost of a girl popped out of the wall. She looked to have lived 16 years before shrugging off her mortal coil, with pale, almost transparent skin, long flowing hair in various shades of purple and light blue eyes. She wore a black and purple Goth dress with three chains hanging from one side of her torso to the other, imitating a bodice-style look, as well as a mesh skirt with a chain running along the top, translucent purple shoes that had chains wrapped around them, ending in metal balls which served as the heels. Her jewelry included a double chain for a necklace, chains with black metal balls for earrings and part of a Victorian shackle for a bracelet. Her makeup included powder blue eyeshadow and lighter blue-purple lipstick.

"An interview!" the ghostly girl exclaimed happily as she hovered in midair, "how wonderfully ghastly!" She then held out her hand for Kairi to shake, despite being transparent, "I'm Spectra Vondergeist, The Ghostly Gossip."

"Uh... nice to meet you, Spectra," said Kairi as she tried to figure out how she was going to shake the hand of the ghost.

"Oh, I quite understand," said Spectra as she withdrew her hand and gave Kairi a reassuring smile, "I sometimes forget that I'm dead when on the trail of hot gossip."

"Well, could you just drop this story, just this once?" Frankie asked, "Kairi's been through a lot lately and..."

"I said I'm not that fragile," said Kairi. She then looked at Spectra, "so, what do you want to know about me?"

"Everything!" Spectra said, "where you're from, where you've been, your hopes and dreams, everything!"

"Just hold on a second, Spectra," said Clawdeen, "I agree with Frankie on this. Kairi just got here."

"Is there a real reason why you don't want me to be interviewed?" Kairi asked, "or do you really think I'm as fragile as a flower?"

"It's not that," said Frankie, "it's just... well... Spectra kinda has a habit of posting her blogs without getting the full facts of her story."

"It's true," said Spectra sheepishly, "being dead, my ears aren't as sharp as they were. And sometimes, when I'm on the trail of a story, I get so into my journalism that I occasionally jump to conclusions. But I draw the line on posting untrue stories."

"Yes, Spectra never lies," said Cleo, "though she does exaggerate the truth sometimes."

"Well, I'll give you the straight truth," said Kairi.

"Are you sure about that?" Frankie asked.

"If she want to give interview, let her," said Abbey, "is good therapy to talk about problems."

"Exactly," said Kairi, "and we do have time before we have to meet up with Ghoulia, so why not use that time for something that will provide entertaining and informative to others?"

"Spoken like a true advocate of journalism," said Spectra.

"Alright," said Frankie, "if it's what you want, Kairi. But just so you know," she then looked at Spectra, "I'll be editing your blog this time, just to make sure you don't misrepresent the facts."

"I wouldn't have it any other way," said Spectra.

A short time later found Kairi, Frankie and the other ghoulish friends in an empty classroom, sitting at the desks as Spectra peppered Kairi with questions. She told the transparent reporter about her exploits as a Keyblade Wielder, her battles with The Heartless and the various Villains, while keeping away from telling too much about Sora and the others.

"You are going to be at the center of everyone's attention," said Spectra, "at least, until tomorrow night's party."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Cleo, "I completely forgot about tomorrow night!"

"I thought you were going to New York," said Clawdeen.

"Well, I am," said Cleo, "but I had forgotten about The Crystal Palace."

"Great Barrier Reef!" exclaimed Lagoona, "I forgot about the club too!"

"What club?" Frankie asked, "oh, wait, I remember reading in Teen Screem magazine; The Crystal Palace is a teen nightclub that's being renovated in downtown New Salem."

"Well, they finished the renovations and it opens tomorrow night!" said Cleo, "and I'm going to miss it!" she then pretended to swoon, "oh, the humanity! A grand reopening of a nightclub and I must miss it!"

"It's just a nightclub," said Draculaura, "how horrible would it be to miss it?"

"This ain't no ordinary nightclub, Draculaura," said Clawdeen, "The Crystal Palace is open to Normies and Monsters."

"It's a place where teenagers, regardless of their species, can come together and have fun," said Frankie.

"Everyone's going to be there," said Spectra, "and I'm going to cover the grand reopening."

"And we're going to miss it?!" exclaimed Draculaura.

"Miss what?" a strong, masculine voice asked. There at the doorway stood a very tall, very athletic werewolf whom was clearly Clawdeen's brother. He had brown fur and gold eyes with long sideburns and a pierced left ear. He wore a black letterman jacket with the emblem of Monster High on it. Kairi could tell that this boy was friendly, outgoing, kind hearted, a natural leader and very much in love with Draculaura.

"Clawd!" exclaimed Draculaura happily as she ran over and leapt into his arms, joyfully nuzzling her head into his well defined chest.

"Hey, D," said Clawd, "miss me?"

"I miss every second we're apart," said Draculaura. With that they kissed

"Don't I get a warm welcome?" said another boy whom walked in after Clawd. This one looked more human, except for the several green snakes growing out of his head that were positioned like a Mohawk. He wore dark sunglasses around his eyes. He wore a red sleeveless shirt with a skull graphic on it, with a gray and white striped vest or a gray hoodie. He wore black pants, a black fingerless glove on his left hand, and a black wristband with the Monster High logo on his right. Across his biceps were green scales. Kairi could tell that this boy was also very friendly and outgoing, kind hearted and loyal, and judging from the way he was looking towards Cleo, madly in love with her.

"Deuce Gorgon," said Cleo happily as she walked over and the two of them embraced, "I have both wondrous news and cataclysmic news."

"Let me guess," said Deuce, "your sister is back in town?"

"Good Heavens, no!" said Cleo, "Nefera's on the other side of the ocean, or she will be very soon. No, this news is something else," she then looked at Clawd, "and it's important news for you as well, Clawd Wolf."

"We're going to New York City tomorrow night!" Draculaura shouted happily.

"The Big Apple!?" Clawd asked, "awesome!"

"Totally, dude!" said Deuce, "wait, what are we doing in New York City?"

"Oh, just attending a little gala that my father and sister couldn't make it for," said Cleo.

"It's a fancy party at a museum, but we get to spend the whole day in the city!" said Draculaura.

"Cool," said Deuce. He then looked at Kairi, "hey, isn't that the chick who fell on Frankie? Far out!"

"You meet all sorts of interesting people at this school," said Clawd.

"Yeah, I kinda have that kind of personality," said Kairi.

A short time later, Kairi meet two more of the ghouls' boyfriends.

Gillington 'Gill' Webber was a river Monster whom was in love with Lagoona. Being from different water environments, Gill and Lagoona had faced tremendous adversity in their romance do to the mistrust and prejudice between salt water and fresh water Monsters. Yet despite their differences, their teamwork on the school swimming squad lead to friendship that blossomed into true love.

Gill was very laid-back and sensitive, a little shy but always willing to do the right thing, capable of great feats of courage when the moment called for it. He had light blue scales and fins protruding from his neck. He had one big fin on the top of head that is styled

like a Mohawk, and flips over to one side. He wore a Monster High letterman jacket, black shorts and a glass helmet over his head that was full of fresh water.

And then there was Heath Burns, a fire elemental who tended to flare up when excited. A hopeless romantic, Heath flirted with just about every girl in the school, almost to the point of arrogant obnoxiousness. He was a vainglorious, over-confident, loud-mouthed braggart and his behavior tended to be rather off-putting and was a bit of a klutz. On the other hand, Heath always tried to help his friends and was always willing to try harder when he made a mistake.

Heath had pale yellow skin, red eyes and fiery red hair, wearing a gray shirt, black pants and a Monster High letterman jacket with flamed sleeves.

Kairi wonder how such a calm, cool and straightforward ghoulish like Abbey would ever be attracted to an overbearing, uncoordinated and downright obnoxious boy like Heath, while also taking into account that he was fire and she was ice.

"He make me laugh," Abbey answered.

"Wow, I've never met someone from another world," said Gill after shaking hands with Kairi, "what's it like out there?"

"Amazing and terrifying at the same time," said Kairi, "but right now, I'm not sure what I'm going to do."

"You could always settle down somewhere," said Heath, "or stay right here," he then tripped over his own shoelaces, earning a laugh from Abbey.

"I actually have two homes to go to," said Kairi, thinking not only of her family back at Destiny Island, but also everyone on Radiant Garden and prayed that they all were safe.

Just then Ghoulia walked into the room, carrying a small briefcase on one hand and her laptop in the other. She then moaned something as she set her laptop and the briefcase on one of the student desks.

"Yes, Ghoulia," said Cleo, "we're all wondering why we're all here. So what is the big surprise already?"

"Yeah, what's the big deal?" Draculaura asked.

Ghoulia then opened the briefcase and pulled out a gold earring that had emeralds and sapphires set into it, moaning in a presentation way as she held the earring up.

"It's beautiful," said Lagoona as she walked closer for a better look, "did you make that?"

Ghoulia moaned and nodded in affirmation as she took off one of her zipper-like earrings and put the gold one on.

"You look frightfully fabulous," said Draculaura.

"Yes, yes, very posh, very glamorous," said Cleo in an impatient tone, "but if that's all you wanted to show us, Ghoulia, then..."

Ghoulia then held out her hand in an interrupting manner, moaned something, then typed a series of commands into her laptop and touched the earring. The earring glowed slightly and the entire body of the genius zombie shimmered with a golden light. When the light cleared, Ghoulia had taken on a more human appearance; her hair had darkened to coal black and her skin was of medium tone with a slight tan.

"Oh my Ra!" exclaimed an astonished Cleo.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Frankie, while sparks of surprise shot from her neck bolts.

"Incredible!" exclaimed Lagoona, while Kairi, Gill, Draculaura and Clawdeen were speechless.

"Dude!" exclaimed Deuce.

"Whoa!" exclaimed both Clawd and Heath, while Heath's hair flared up into fire and his eyes glowed bright yellow. His hands also flared up, producing enough heat to accidentally set the sleeve of Clawd's jacket on fire. Heath then calmed down enough to help Clawd put the fire out.

Ghoulia then moaned something in the form of a question.

"I... of course we like it," said Frankie in an unsure tone, "but what did you do to yourself?"

Ghoulia moaned something as she opened a file on her laptop and showed everyone the screen. They saw a diagram of the earring, the inside of which was a highly complex mass of circuitry.

"Oh, now I get it," said Draculaura, "no, wait, I don't get it."

"I think it's a hologram projector," said Kairi, "I know an A.I. program who uses a similar projector for her avatar."

Ghoulia then nodded in confirmed acknowledgement. She then touched the earring again and her body shimmered again, revering back to her normal undead form.

"You made a hologram projector that can make you look like a Normie?" Clawdeen asked, to which Ghoulia moaned and nodded 'yes.'

"Why make such thing?" Abbey asked.

"So we Monsters can go about among Normies without attracting attention, obviously," said Heath, "but no way am I wearing an earring."

"No offense, Ghoulia," said Clawd, "you're the smartest ghoul in school, and that hologram projector is really cool and all..."

"It's so awesome, it's bad!" said Deuce, "dude, I'd wear one... but not one that... well..."

"Feminine?" Gill asked timidly.

"Oh, come now, Gill," said Lagoona, "you're not afraid of a little sparkly earring?"

Ghoulia then moaned something and took out two belt buckles in the form of the Monster High embalm, only these were made of gold and sapphires like the earring. She then held up another earring, while pulling out two more.

"Oh, there's only two that are hologram projectors," said Frankie, "the others are there to make matched pairs."

"And the belt buckles are equally fang-tastic!" said Draculaura.

"Did I say you were a genius, Ghoulia?" Cleo asked, "you're a super genius!"

At that Ghoulia moaned something in a modest tone, while also looking slightly bashful.

"Oh, don't be so modest," said Cleo, "this is your invention, so you should take the credit for it."

"She's got my vote for genius of the year," said Clawdeen.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" Draculaura asked.

"That we can use those items in The Big Apple?" Clawd asked.

"Totts!" exclaimed Draculaura.

"It's settled then!" said Cleo, "Claud, Draculaura, Deuce and Ghoulia shall use the items tomorrow night, while I'll be appearing in my natural grace and beauty of course," she then looked at Frankie, "while Frankie and everyone else shall enjoy The Crystal Palace."

"What about Kairi?" Frankie asked, "where's she going to be tomorrow night? And where's she going to stay while she's on our world?"

"She could stay at my place," said Draculaura. She then looked at Kairi, "I hope you don't mind gothic houses and dungeons."

"Oh, that's not necessary," said Kairi, "I'll find a motel to stay and..."

"No way are you staying at some crummy old motel!" said Frankie, "you can stay at my place. My parents are out of town," she then glared at her friends, "and no parties at my house!"

"Frankie, everyone who's anyone will be at The Crystal Palace tomorrow night," said Clawdeen.

"Except for us," said Draculaura.

"Well, here's one ghoulish friend who won't be staying by herself tomorrow night," said Frankie, "Kairi, you're coming with us to The Crystal Palace."

"What? I can't go," said Kairi, "I'm not invited."

"You don't need an invite, love," said Lagoona, "just pay the cover charge."

"Which I'll take care of," said Frankie, "all you need to worry about is what to wear to the club."

"There's only one solution to that dilemma," said Lagoona.

"Shopping!" exclaimed Draculaura happily.

Just then the 3:00 bell rang, signaling the end of the school day.

"To the maul, everyone!" said Cleo in a determined tone, "tomorrow night is to be a grand event for all and we all must look out best!"

"And then there's the packing," said Draculaura.

"Naturally," said Cleo.

And so Kairi found herself among strange but welcoming friends, and a free shopping trip to boot. Despite her recent horrors, Kairi felt and believed that she was safe and would soon be ready to pull her life back together.

... Castle Oblivion...

Sephiroth entered a room within one of the towers in the castle, a room that seemed to be empty and illuminated by a single overhead lamp, leaving most of the room in shadows.

"Very clever," said the one-winged angel to the empty room, "using one of the cards in our game to hide a message. And my compliments on the anti-spying wards. Are you sure that we cannot be observed?"

Just then Regina emerged from the shadows into the cone of light cast by the lamp, "these wards are from my own spell repertoire," said the former evil queen, "my own grimoire. Trust me, we are completely safe from prying eyes and ears."

"I've seen Xehanort's Interocitor in action," said Sephiroth, "and Maleficent, she..."

"Maleficent's magic is all stolen from Hecate's book," said Regina in an insisting tone, "she's never created anything original in her miserable life! I earned my magic the hard way! As for Xehanort's machine, my spells ward against technological espionage as well."

"Then let's talk," said Sephiroth, "your message said that we should exchange information that would be too sensitive for our comrades to hear."

"True," said Regina, "you have secrets to share, as do I."

"Ladies first," said Sephiroth.

"Thank you," said Regina, "first, I know without a doubt that Maleficent has made no effort to create a permanent body for herself, nor will she in the immediate future. Her hatred of The Keyblade Wielders and all those in The Realms of Light is blinding her to the simple truth; she is no longer The Mistress Of All Evil."

"I suspected that her star has begun to fall," said Sephiroth, "but what does that have to do with either you or myself?"

"Maleficent's narrow-mindedness will be her undoing," said Regina, "she's left herself vulnerable to betrayal. Of course, she still has enough reason to guard herself against attack, but with the right plan and the right opportunity, she can be destroyed, as well as Xehanort."

"I have my own secrets about Xehanort to share," said Sephiroth, "but what about those new lieutenants Maleficent claimed to have created?"

"The offspring of Xorat and Kiraxi," said Regina, "I saw that mass of proto-flesh she's growing in that cavern; repulsive but nonetheless interesting. I've determined that the twelve creatures that shall mature from that mass shall indeed be powerful creatures of darkness, and loyal to whomever awakens them. Once they're complete, the twelve enforcers will be nothing but sleeping creatures, only to be woken up by magic. The caster of that spell shall have the fealty of the twelve."

"And you seek to be that spell caster," said Sephiroth, "after Maleficent is removed. But what about that potion of hers that's

keeping you hale and whole? Without it, you'll be a decrepit, powerless, old crone again."

"It all depends on how soon I can make my move on that lunatic scientist," said Regina, "Insano may be a degenerate, but he's still brilliant enough to synthesize the potion for me."

"And Lady Tremaine?" Sephiroth asked.

"She's still useful," said Regina, "but expendable, same as that muscle-head, Gaston."

"I could say the same for Dio Brando," said Sephiroth, "and now for my secrets."

"Yes, tell me about Xehanort," said Regina.

"A shriveled up old man with delusions of immortality," said Sephiroth, "he seeks to rule all with the power of Kingdom Hearts, that and much more, but his time is long past."

"I know that," said Regina.

"But did you know that he has a plan to revive Organization XIII?" Sephiroth asked.

"That I did not," said Regina.

"He's already completed most of the necessary work," said Sephiroth, "he thinks that I am in the dark of his plans, but I know that deep within the castle, he has set up a laboratory that is not only reviving Xemnes, Saix and the others, minus Axel and Roxas, but he has also begun recreating their respective Heartless."

"Really?" an intrigued Regina asked.

"I've seen it!" said Sephiroth, "his machines are in the process of recreating the Heartless Ansem, the same creature whom took possession of Riku and brought about The End Of The World. He

was just one step away from entering Kingdom Hearts when Sora stopped him."

"Xemnes and the Heartless Ansem were powerful creatures indeed," said Regina, "if Xehanort can control them, then..."

"He cannot control them yet," said Sephiroth, "he would have revived The Organization and their respective Heartless already, yet he lacks a sufficient power source to do so. With his current resources, if he were to put everything he has into it, he could, maybe, complete one of his abominations, preferably either Xemnes or the Heartless Ansem, if he were lucky."

"So, that's why he brought along that maniac," said Regina, "Xehanort needs Insano to create a better power source. And whomever controls the machine, controls the revived Nobodies and Heartless."

"Indeed," said Sephiroth, "more so, he is also in the process of recreating the body of Terra, the young Keyblade Wielder whom he possessed after the devastating battle over ten years ago."

"Young Xehanort," said Regina, "that one was brilliant. He was the one whose experiments in the darkness brought about the downfall of Radiant Garden, triggering a chain of events that has lead up to now. With Young Xehanort, Xemnes and the Heartless Ansem at his command, Old Xehanort would be nigh invincible.

"Which brings us to the culmination," said Sephiroth, "why seek me out as a partner?"

"Because you, I actually find worthy," said Regina, "Maleficent and Xehanort want it all. Their greed will destroy them. Lady Tremaine and Dio Brando may be useful, but are easily cast aside, where as you, despite your former obsession with godhood, you are worthy of my time."

At that Sephiroth placed his hand on the handle of Masamune, "what's stopping me from destroying you here and now? Or even so much as going to Maleficent and Xehanort?"

"The simple fact that you're smarter than those two," said Regina, "you know your limits and have reasonable desires."

"Yes," said Sephiroth as he took his hand away from his sword, "Maleficent and Xehanort want it all, yet I would be satisfied with simply the realms of light, for now. Conquest in moderation."

"Conquest in moderation," said Regina, "what an interesting concept." She then held out her hand, which Sephiroth shook.

"When do we make our move?" Sephiroth asked.

"When the time is right," said Regina, "for now, we let events play out. The opportunity to strike will present itself."

"And when it does," said Sephiroth, "Xehanort and Maleficent will never see us coming."

The end of chapter 2.

Next chapter, both Sora, Kairi and their respective friends enjoy a night out, while the forces of darkness are ready to strike. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Dual Crisis

Last time found Sora and the gang getting to know the alternate Ramblers and learning of the plan to protect The Necronomicon. Meanwhile, Kairi got to know more about Frankie and her fellow Monsters at Monster High. When Cleo was offered the chance to take some of her ghoulfriends to New York City, Frankie invited Kairi to go with her to the opening of a teen nightclub. Elsewhere, Sephiroth and Regina planned to betray Maleficent and Xehanort, but who is betraying who? 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 3: Dual Crisis

... New York City... Waldorf-Astoria Hotel... BPRD H.Q....

"Did I ever tell you guys that I hate getting dressed up?" Malcolm asked as he stood in front of a full length mirror, looking miserably at his tuxedo-clad reflection.

"Not recently," said Riku as he and Sora also looked at their reflection, while Riku was straightening his bowtie and Sora brushed a bit of lint off of his sleeve.

"Oh come on, Malcolm," said Tess, whom was wearing a blue and green single shoulder dress with a ruffled hemline, with gold earrings, a gold necklace and two gold bracelets on her wrists and her hair styled straight, "you look fine."

"I look like a total square!" said Malcolm, "like I've given up on my individuality and sold out to the establishment!"

"Hey, don't freak out, man," said Sora.

"This isn't the first time we had to get all dressed up and it won't be the last," said Riku.

"Being a Keyblade Wielder has its ups and downs," said Tess.

"This is one down I'd rather skip," said Malcolm, "are you sure it's not too late to talk to Patricia about reassignment? I could help in the control room, watching one of the security screens. Or I could be a security guard."

"Even the security guards have to wear formal uniforms," said Sora.

"Just grit your teeth and go with it, Malcolm," said Riku, "it'll be over in a couple of hours."

"At least be glad that your suit fits," said Sora as he tugged at his shirt collar, "mine's a little tight."

"Mine's too loose," said Riku.

"They had to fit yours at the last minute," said Tess, "me, on the other hand," she then did a graceful twirl, "well... what do you think?"

"I think you look perfect in anything," said Riku.

"You all look fabulous," said Patricia as she walked in, wearing a red and black gown, her cane now having a gold handle.

"Are you absolutely sure you need me out in the open?" Malcolm asked, "I'd be better helping from the shadows, I just know it."

"Oh, don't be so negative," said Patricia, "ya'll be fine. Besides, ya'll have the rare privilege of actually seeing the real Necronomicon before they set up the hologram."

At that Malcolm hesitated for a second before answering, "well, I guess that would make it worth it."

A short time later found our heroes in a meeting room on one of the pocket dimensions floors where everyone involved in the evening's operation were taking part in a final briefing.

"Ya'll know your assignments," said Patricia, "Tyler, you're be in the control room, overseeing all the security systems. Your code name is

'Big Brother.'"

"I've got my eye on you all!" said Tyler, earning laughter from everyone.

"Ken, you'll head the museum building security team," said Patricia, "if anyone tries to break in during the gala, you'll be the first line of defense. Your code name is 'Watchman.'"

"Who's going to watch me?" Ken asked, earning more laughter from everyone in the room. Mark was also wearing a tuxedo, as was Steven and Ken, whom had been assigned to security in the gallery where The Necronomicon would be displayed.

"Steven, your handle is 'Hound Dog,'" said Patricia

"Gee, I wonder why?" Steven asked.

"Felicia, you'll be with the staff serving Hors d'oeuvres," said Patricia, "Julia, you'll be at the coat rack. Aaron, Leon, Max and Laura and myself will be mingling among the guests."

"While keeping one eye on the Necronomicon," said Max. He, Aaron and Leon were also wearing tuxedos, while Laura was wearing a green and black strapless dress with sequences, while Felicia wore a black dress and Julia wore a black dress with a white top.

"Felicia, you're 'Flower Child' and Julia is 'Ms. Flamingo,'" said Patricia. "Aaron, you're 'M.D.D.,' Leon is 'Bandit 1,' Laura is 'Cadillac,' Max is 'Hardboiled,' where as I'll be 'Mother Goose.'"

"Who came up with these code names?" Max asked.

"They were randomly generated in a computer," said Patricia, "what, ya'll think I just pulled them out of a hat? Oh, by the way, Sora, your handle for the evening is Key 1, Riku's Key 2, Tess is Key 3 and Malcolm is Key 4."

"Thanks for keeping them simple," said Sora.

"Now," said Patricia, "there's been a few last minute changes in assignments. John, you've been moved from underground watch to rooftop watch. And your handle is 'Trueshot.'"

"So instead of guarding the sewers," said John Baxter, a near identical version of the John Baxter that Sora and the others knew, "I'll be out in the cold."

"It's not my fault that a cold front decided to move in," said Patricia, "look, John, you're one of the best snipers in The Bureau. If anyone is going to attack from outside the museum, you'll see them coming from a mile away."

"Why is he on the roof and I'm the hat-shake girl?" Julia asked irately, "I can out-snipe John any day of the week."

"You wanted to be inside," said Rebecca Covington, a near identical version of the Rebecca that our heroes knew. This Rebecca was a full psychic empath, able to sense past events through retro-cognition.

Sora and the others also had met two other Bureau members who were doubles of people they had met at Hogwarts. J.D Walker and Jessie Elmsworth, but where as the J.D. they knew was a blind Scanner, this J.D. was a Krelboyne, and instead of an Auror, this Jessie was a martial artist with the Meta Human power of energy manipulation.

"J.D. is 'Mastermind,' Jessie is 'Sledgehammer' and Rebecca is 'Tsunami,'" said Patricia, "now, ya'll got your communication earpieces, I trust?"

"Right here!" said Tess as she held up a small piece of metal that easily fit into her ear, while Sora and Riku also held up theirs. Malcolm was still trying to figure out how to put his on.

"They'll allow everyone to coordinate with the control room," said Patricia, "now, Sora, you and your friends will be mostly as backup to

Max and the others, but if anything should happen, you know what to do."

"Stop anyone from grabbing The Necronomicon," said Sora, "piece of cake."

"Maybe," said Patricia, "maybe nothing will happen. Maybe all of our efforts may have been wasted. But that's no reason not to do our best and keep that book from the wrong hands."

"While also ensuring the safety of all those rich fat cats at the party," said Laura.

"That too," said Patricia, "yes, we have to keep the high rollers safe. Oh, before I forget, the rich jerk who's responsible for this whole mess, Ramses de Nile, the so called Great Pharaoh, he got called out of town on business yesterday."

"Then why didn't you tell us this before!?" Steven asked as he pulled off his bowtie, "gala's been canceled, everyone! I know a great bar down in Tribeca! Last one there picks up the tab!"

"No one is going anywhere except to the museum!" snapped Patricia, "and put your tie back on, Steven!"

At that Steven redid his bowtie sheepishly, while Patricia continued, "now, this Great Pharaoh, while he is a 3000 year old mummy with a lot of financial power and political influence, he's still a man, no matter how much of a bastard he is."

"A real mummy?" Sora asked in a confused tone, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm also looked confused, and concerned, "you never told us this."

"Oh, sorry, I did forget that," said Patricia sheepishly, "sorry. Well, on this world, Monsters are real and have their own society alongside ours. Max will explain."

"Do I have to?" Max asked irately.

"Yes!" snapped Patricia, "as far as I'm concerned, Max Kildare, you and your team are still on thin ice after that stunt you pulled. You will brief Sora and the others on Monsters on the way to the museum and you'll like it!"

"Whatever you say, boss lady," said Max in a subdued but still irate tone.

"More like dragon lady," muttered Leon, "oh, excuse me, Mother Goose."

"I heard that," said Patricia, "any hoo, the event is still going on, despite the absence of the old mummy. His daughter will be representing him in his place for the event, one Cleo de Nile."

"Oh, her," said an annoyed Laura, "just great, not only do we have to baby sit the most dangerous book in existence, we also have to baby sit a spoiled little princess of a mummy!" at that several more of the Meta Humans and mortal agents began muttering irately.

"Do I look like I'm happy with this!?" Patricia shouted in a very loud voice, "because I'm not! If I had my way I'd call off this whole stupid event and burn the book myself! But I can't do either! This is how things are and if you're not happy with it, if you want to quit," she then pointed to the door, "be my guest."

It was a subdued moment as everyone looked at each other, waiting to see who would get up and walk out first. But no one went for the door.

"Good, at least we all are on the same level," said Patricia in a normal tone of voice, "so let's all just grit our teeth and get this night over with. God willing, nothing will happen, but it's better to prepare for the worst and hope for the best."

"Now, it's 5:30 PM. We're all to be in position by 6:45, with the guests arriving at 7:00 and the book unveiling at 8:00. Things should be winding down by 10:00 when the book is lowered into the vault and the hologram projector is primed to activate tomorrow morning. Only The Bureau and a handful of museum employees know the truth, not even the so called Great Pharaoh, and God willing, no one else will know."

"Four and a half hours," said Leon, "I've waited in Star Wars convention lines longer than that."

"But you're a Star Trek fan," said Laura.

"But his girl friend is a Star Wars fan," said Julia in a teasing manner. This earned a laugh from all of the Bureau personnel.

"Oh shut up!" snapped Leon as he irately crossed his arms.

"Alright, that's enough," said Patricia, "remember, keep your senses sharp. You see, hear, feel, smell, taste or notice anything suspicious, you sound off on your earpiece, regardless of how irrelevant it may seem. I'm serious, you get so much as a tingle at the back of your head, you sound off."

"And if it really is trouble," said Tyler, "we push the button and seal the gallery and put the whole museum on lockdown."

"While getting the civilians to safety," said Laura.

"Of course," said Tyler.

"Any questions?" Patricia asked.

One of the human agents raise a hand, "what happens if a false alarm happens and the button is pushed anyway? What happens if we end up in lockdown with no real trouble?"

"If it turns out to truly be a false alarm and/or an accidental lockdown," said Patricia, "then the control room will release the

lockdown and we'll all be able to get out. Of course, if that happens, then the book will go into its special vault regardless, so either way, it'll be safe."

"You just answered my questions," said Max, while several more operatives voiced their agreements.

"Any other questions?" Patricia asked.

At that Laura raised her hand, "is Jill really coming to the gala?"

"If she was coming she would have called us to say she was here in New York," said Julia.

"As far as I know," said Patricia, "Jill could still be down in Miami, or even in Washington. She could be watching an early show on Broadway for all I know. She's still on leave and if she doesn't want to talk to us, that's her prerogative. We have our mission and she knows it. Now, let's get going."

A few minutes later found our heroes in a limo with Max and Laura, driving from the hotel to the museum. The others going to the museum were also traveling in limos, while a few were taking SUV's.

"We should be there in a few minutes," said Laura, "assuming we don't run into serious traffic. Then again, this is Manhattan during rush hour."

"Don't get me started on rush hour traffic," said Max as he unholstered his revolver, unloaded it, checked the barrel, reloaded, spun the cylinder and holstered the gun. "in fact don't talk to me about anything right now."

"Will you just relax?" Laura asked, "this isn't that big a deal."

"It is to me," said Max. he then looked at Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, "you've never seen what The Necronomicon can do, right?"

"We've seen some pretty evil stuff in our time," said Riku.

"And lived through a lot of it," said Tess.

"I'm still the new guy," said Malcolm, "but I've seen some pretty heavy badness."

"Well, I'll bet that everything you've gone through would seem like a walk in the park after fighting what hellish nightmares The Necronomicon can vomit up."

"You could have done it, you know," said Malcolm.

"Done what?" Sora asked.

"Destroyed this copy of The Necronomicon," said Max, "and I could have done it. Yes, I could have, and should have when we got the order to bring it back. I could have had it destroyed any time before handing it over to the museum, but I didn't. I still have my sense of honor and duty to The Bureau, to America, to the whole world. Sometimes you get orders that you don't like, but you still have to follow them."

"And the fact that if we had destroyed the book," said Laura, "we'd be branded traitors and hunted down like wild animals."

"That too," said Max.

"Well, at least this copy will only be vulnerable for a few more hours," said Malcolm.

"It's when you think that it's almost over that things get worse," said Max, "real worse. Believe me, I've seen good situations do a complete 180. I can tell you about some of that."

"I thought you were going to tell them about Monsters," said Laura.

"Yeah, what about Monsters?" Tess asked.

"You really want to know?" Max asked.

"Definitely," said Sora, while Riku and Malcolm nodded in agreement.

"Okay, here's how it is," said Max, "Since like... forever, humans and Monsters have lived side by side. I'm talking about vampires, were-beasts, ghosts, zombies, gargoyles and creatures of all shapes and sizes. These being were, and are still, people, just like humans, with families, jobs, social lives and trends.

"For a while things were harmonious between Monsters and humans, or Normies as they like to call us, and they call us Meta Humans the same, despite our obvious differences. But then things went down hill fast when religious agitators and hate mongers started turning the average man and woman against Monsters, making them out to be really monstrous."

"There's been a lot of minor and moderate conflicts between Monsters and Normies throughout history," said Laura, "but things have been relatively calm in the late 20th Century and early 21st to this day. In fact, things are better. Humans are more accepting of Monsters now, so long as they don't cause trouble."

"If a Monster breaks the law, they're punished by the law," said Max, "if they commit a robbery, vandalism or assault a human, they're arrested and sent to jail. But if they go too far, if they step over the line and cross over into the depths of evil, if they truly become monstrous, then The Bureau steps in and deals with them."

"But that's only under extreme circumstances," said Laura, "nearly all of the time, Monsters are people who only want to live in peace. Sometimes they involve themselves in human affairs, such as tonight."

"This Great Pharaoh, Ramses de Nile, was a real life Egyptian Pharaoh thousands of years ago," said Max, "according to his file, he's now a high-end businessman worth billions, so he could afford to buy protection for The Necronomicon."

"What about his daughter?" Riku asked, "the girl who's supposed to be there at the museum tonight?"

"Cleo de Nile is like an average high school Queen Bee," said Laura, "rich, spoiled, expects the world to bow before her, but knows when to do the right thing. But she's still a brat and if I have to play gofer to her tonight, I'll do what I did to my high school nemesis during that Halloween dance."

"I'd doubt you'd make any friends by ripping her dress apart at the seams," said Max, "especially if you use your power doing it."

"I may have to play hostess to her," said Laura stubbornly, "but I don't have to like her."

"How bad could she be?" Sora asked.

"Truthfully," said Laura, "a lot better than her bitch of an older sister. Now, you take Nefera de Nile, now she's evil through and through. And let's be thankful that she is in Europe tonight."

"Wish I was somewhere else tonight," said Max, "if I had my way, I'd be down in Washington, knocking some Congress heads together. Stupid Democrats! And stupid Republicans! I'm glad I'm an Independent."

"Meta Humans vote?" Riku asked.

"Of course," said Max as he looked at Riku as if he was just asked a stupid question, "most Meta Humans were born in The United States, and those of us whom are of legal age enjoy the rights and privileges that every American citizen enjoys."

"The only thing we have to worry about is revealing our powers to the general public," said Laura, "they're okay with Monsters, but mortals with super powers, that'd be asking a little too much of them."

"If Kairi were here," said Sora, "she'd say something about how people could be more accepting if given the chance."

"Maybe," said Max, "maybe, if given time. But that's for later. I just want to get this night over with and make sure that The Necronomicon is locked away forever."

"Yeah," said Laura.

"Forgive me for changing the subject," said Tess as she looked out the window, "but when this whole mess is over, I'd love to see more of the city."

"Me too," said Riku, "we spent yesterday afternoon, evening and all of today getting ready for the mission."

"I think we've earned a little R & R after this," said Malcolm.

"I'll spend my R & R looking for Kairi," said Sora.

"We've already got people looking for her," said Laura, "not many, but once this mess with The Necronomicon is over, we'll find her so fast, you'll wonder if she ever was missing."

"I hope so," said Sora.

A short time later they had arrived at the museum. Sora's group was soon inside and was shown to the gallery where the book would be displayed. It was a recently constructed gallery near the Ancient History wing of the museum. Inside were white walls lit with overhead lamps. Adorning the walls were relics of ancient artwork, ranging from cave drawings to Egyptian Hieroglyphs. Also on display were vases from Greece, China, as well as clay tablets from Babylon and artifacts from India, Africa and the Americas.

By 6:55 P.M., all the Bureau operatives were in position and ready for the expected guests.

"Remind me, how many are supposed to be coming?" Sora asked.

"No more than fifty," said Laura, "not counting Ms. de Nile and her entourage. She's expected to have three or four of her fellow students with her."

"Students?" Tess asked.

"We didn't tell you?" Laura asked, "Monsters have their own schools. Cleo and her friends go to the most popular, Monster High, where Monsters of all shape and size congregate in peace, friendship and education."

Just then Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm heard Tyler on their earpieces, "Com system check. All units sound off."

"Mother Goose, standing by," said Patricia.

"Hardboiled, standing by," said Max.

"Bandit 1, standing by," said Leon.

"Watchman, standing by," said Ken.

"Hound Dog, standing by," said Steven.

"Flower Child, standing by," said Felicia.

"Ms. Flamingo, standing by," said Julia.

"Trueshot, standing by," said John.

"Tsunami, standing by," said Rebecca.

"Sledgehammer, standing by," said Jessie.

"Mastermind, standing by," said J.D.

"Cadillac, standing by," said Laura.

"M.D.D., standing by," said Aaron.

"Key 1, standing by," said Sora.

"Key 2, standing by," said Riku.

"Key 3, standing by," said Tess.

"Key 4, standing by," said Malcolm.

"Big Brother, standing by," said Tyler, "all systems are go for Operation Triple B."

"Triple B?" Sora asked.

"Big Bad Book," said Max.

"My thoughts exactly," said Riku as he pressed his wrists, "and if my friend Aiden were here, he'd say 'Alright, let's do this!'"

"Couldn't have said it better," said Patricia. Just then the clock struck 7:00 and the guests began to arrive.

"Remind me why we're waiting to go in?" Clawd asked as he, Draculaura, Ghoulia, Deuce and Cleo waited in their limo just outside the museum.

Draculaura was wearing a pink and black satin dress with a frilled skirt and black high healed shoes, and had her hair tied into an elegant braid. She wore a gold charm bracelet on her right wrist and wore her Shimmer earrings. The device hid her pointed ears and fangs while also darkening her skin a few shades.

Clawd wore a blue and white sports-coat, blue slacks, polished black shoes and a green and blue tie. He had on his Shimmer belt buckle, the device hiding his wolfish features, making him appear as an African American teenager with short black hair.

Ghoulia's Shimmer earrings were on, while she wore a sparkly black and white dress with matching shoes. Her hair was curled and she

wore red glasses.

Deuce's Shimmer belt buckle hid his scales and made his snakes appear as shoulder-length brown hair tied back. He wore a green and gold suit and tie, while also keeping his sunglasses on.

"We're waiting for the right moment," said Cleo, whom was wearing a gold, green and black Egyptian gown with gold bracelets, earrings, necklace, shoes and handbag, with her hair styled to one side. "To make my grand entrance."

"Hey, you can make an entrance any time you want and you'll still look wicked to me," said Deuce.

"You're so good to me, Deuce, baby," said Cleo in an adoring tone as she touched his face lovingly, "and you look gorgeous, but I've got to admit that your sunglasses clash with your outfit."

"I still need them, babe," said Deuce, "the Shimmer did a good job making me look like a Normie, but it didn't work on my eyes. I take my glasses off and I'm a walking statue maker."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"I know, you already told us that it wasn't perfect," said Deuce.

"Just be glad that we've been able to enjoy the city without being chased by an angry mob," said Draculaura. She then smiled brightly, displaying a set of perfectly white, fangless teeth, "I had so much fun today! We saw The Statue of Liberty, The Empire State Building and saw a short play on Broadway! Best day ever!"

"And now we're going to top it off with a nice visit to a museum," said Clawd. He then glared at Cleo, "assuming you ever unlock this car!"

"Dude! Whoever made a car alarm app should be skinned!" said Deuce irately. "Ghoulia, can't you hack Cleo's I-Coffin or something?"

At that Ghoulia held up her coffin-like cell phone and moaned something.

"That's a very complicated password," said Draculaura.

"We're not going in until I say it's the right moment!" said Cleo stubbornly as she crossed her arms. Her phone then chimed as a set alarm occurred, "and that time is now." With that she entered a twelve digit password into her phone and the car unlocked.

"How'd you remember all of that?" Clawd asked.

"It's pure, natural talent," said Cleo as they all got out of the limo.

At that Ghoulia moaned something and showed Clawd, Draculaura and Deuce her phone, displaying twelve numbers.

"Oh, now I get it," said Draculaura, "it's just 1 through 6, only twice."

"Ghoulia!" said an outraged Cleo, but then calmed down, "well, I guess I did have it coming, but I'll be sure to pick a better password next time."

"Just so long as it's not 6 through 1 repeated," said Clawd.

A short time later they were inside the museum and were just outside the gala gallery.

"They really went big on security here," said Clawd after he and the others had to pass through a series of scans for weapons and explosives.

"This is The Necronomicon," said Cleo, "the oldest and most dangerous book in the world. Naturally, The Bureau would want it safe, as does my father."

"Yeah, well, they didn't have to be so rough," said Clawd, "seriously, when they patted me down for weapons, I thought they were going to do a strip and cavity search."

"At least the chick at the coat check was nice," said Deuce, "and cute, for a Normie."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Ghoulia's right," said Draculaura, "the coat check girl was hiding something, as is a lot of people here."

"Well, The BPRD is known for being very secretive," said Cleo, "but at least they're good at what they do."

"Protecting the good and punishing evil," said Deuce, "far out."

They then reached the gallery and were announced by a member of the museum staff. "Announcing Ms. Cleo de Nile and company!"

Cleo and the others walked into the gallery. There were about a hundred men and women, including catering staff and museum security. The five young Monsters mingled with the other guests, mostly rich patrons of the museum, archeologists and historians.

They also admired the various artifacts from the ancient world. "Man, those Greeks had style," said Deuce.

"Please," said Cleo in an annoyed tone, "the Athenians were a race of barbarians. Now, consider the bounties of the home country," she then indicated the artwork from Ancient Egypt, "classic Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, if I'm not mistaken."

"It's a reproduction," said Draculaura.

"What?!" a shocked and confused Cleo asked, "Impossible! It's a genuine wall carving from the 12th Dynasty."

"Is that her?" Sora asked Patricia. Since the first guests began arriving, Sora and the others were with Patricia as they stood in the

middle of the room, where the display case for The Necronomicon stood veiled, waiting for the appointed hour.

"The girl in the Egyptian getup?" Patricia asked, "the one making a fuss over the Egyptian artifacts? Yep, that's Cleo de Nile."

"She doesn't look like a bratty princess," said Riku.

"She's got a good heart in her," said Tess, "I can tell that from here."

"And she's cute too," said Malcolm.

"Don't let Merida hear that," said Sora.

"Hey, I can look so long as I don't touch," said Malcolm.

"Strange though," said Patricia as she looked at Cleo, "one would think that Ms. de Nile would have choose her fellow Monster High students for her entourage, not a quartet of humans."

Just then Sora heard Tyler on his earpiece, "Big Brother to Mother Goose."

"Go ahead, Big Brother," said Patricia.

"I'm running a check on the four with Mummy Girl," said Tyler, "but I'm sure that they're Monsters."

"Cadillac to Mother Goose," said Laura, "they're Monsters, alright."

"Confirmed, Mother Goose," said Tyler, "Clawd Wolf, Deuce Gorgon, Ghoulia Yelps and Draculaura. They all have clean records."

"Then they're friendly," said Max, "permission to make contact, Mother Goose."

"Negative, Hardboiled," said Patricia, "your reputation might make things uncomfortable for our young friends. Cadillac, since you and Mummy Girl have had prior relations, you'll make contact."

"Will do, Mother Goose," said Laura, though she sounded like she would rather eat something disgusting than go talk to Cleo.

"Key 1," said Patricia, "you, Key 2, Key 3 and Key 4 go with Cadillac, get to know Ms. De Nile and her friends, learn something."

"We're standing right here," said Tess.

"I know," said Patricia, "now get to it."

"Yeah, okay," said Sora. With that he, Riku, Tess and Malcolm met up with Laura and they walked over to Cleo and her friends.

"I'm telling you, Draculaura," said Cleo, "it's authentic!"

"And I'm telling you that it's not," said Draculaura in an insisting manner.

"How can you tell?" Clawd asked.

"When you've been around as long as I have," said Draculaura, "you learn a thing or two about antiques."

"So it's true," said Laura as she walked up to the five Monsters, "you really are 1,600 years old."

At that Cleo made an annoyed sound and crossed her arms, "I should have known that you'd be here, Laura Hurst!"

"Cleo de Nile," said Laura, "you look radiant as always."

"Isn't she the quirky psychic you ran into a while back?" Deuce asked.

"And the same person who dumped an entire punch bowl on my white outfit last September," said an irate Cleo.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"You're right, Ghoulia," said Laura, "it should teach Cleo not to wear white after Labor Day."

"You understood that?" Malcolm asked.

"Of course," said Laura as she tapped her head, indicating her psychic powers. She then introduced our heroes to the five Monsters.

"In case you're wondering," said Clawd, "I'm a werewolf, D here is a vampire, Ghoulia's a zombie and Deuce is... is..." he then looked at Deuce, "just what is a Medusa, anyway?"

"I'm an awesomely bad boy with slick eyes," said Deuce.

"You don't look like a monster," said Sora, "in fact, you all look perfectly human to me."

At that Ghoulia moaned something in an gleeful tone.

"She says that her invention is a total success," said Draculaura, "and that she's a genius."

"You don't believe that we're Monsters?" Deuce asked. He then lowered his sunglasses, exposing his green eyes.

"Look away!" said Clawd urgently as he covered his eyes, while Ghoulia, Cleo, Draculaura and Laura did the same.

Riku, Tess and Malcolm also covered their eyes, but Sora was too slow and wound up looking right at Deuce. Green beams shot from Deuce's eyes and in a flash of green magic, Sora was turned to stone.

"Holy crap!" exclaimed Tess as she, Riku and Malcolm uncovered their eyes.

"In a nutshell," said Laura.

"Was that really necessary?" Clawd asked as Deuce put his glasses back on.

"Dude, he totally called me out," said Deuce.

Just then Max and Leon appeared next to Riku, Malcolm and Tess, "what's all the hubbub!?" Leon asked, "who petrified Sora?"

"I bet I know," said Max as he glared irately at Deuce, "a young punk showing off, that's what happened."

"Hey, chill out, man," said Deuce as he raised his hands in a placating gesture, "he'll be back to normal in like, ten minutes or so."

"Or so?" Riku asked, "this is my best friend we're talking about here."

"Well, it all depends on the person being petrified," said Deuce, "sometimes it's ten minutes, sometimes it's ten hours."

"Ten hours?!" exclaimed Tess.

"I'm sure that it won't take that long," said Cleo, "I hope."

At that Ghoulia moaned something as she did a quick calculation on her I Coffin.

"Oh, that's a relief," said Cleo, "she says that Sora will be back to normal in forty two minutes."

"We can't wait that long," said Malcolm. He then summoned his Keyblade, tapped the petrified Sora and said a spell. The stone shattered and Sora stood there good as new.

"What... what happened?" Sora asked in a confused manner.

"You kinda did an impression of a fossil there," said Malcolm.

"Never mind that," said an eager Draculaura, "what's up with that weird sword?"

"Looks like a key, sort of," said Clawd.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Keyblades?" Cleo asked, "what on Earth is a Keyblade?"

"Long story," said Riku.

"Which can wait," said Max. "You, Mr. Gorgon, I'd be most appreciative if you kept those eyes of yours holstered."

"Who are you to tell me what to do with my eyes?" Deuce asked boldly.

"I'm the guy who goes to work when one of your people crosses the line," said Max.

"Oh my Ra!" exclaimed Cleo, "you're Max Kildare!"

"The Max Kildare?" Draculaura asked, "that's incredible!" she then looked at Clawd with confused eyes, "who's Max Kildare?"

"Don't you know?" Clawd asked, "he's The Indestructible Man. He's taken down over a dozen A class demons this year alone."

"A baker's dozen actually," said Max, "and about four times as many B class and over two hundred C and D class."

"Ever go up against an S class?" Deuce asked.

"Not alone," said Max, "you'd have to be suicidal to tackle one of those things by yourself. But yeah, I've helped kill S class demons, about seven."

"No, it was six," said Leon, "we've fought six S class demons so far."

"No, it was seven," said Max.

"Six," insisted Leon, he then touched his earpiece, "Bandit 1 to Mother Goose, did we fight six S class or not?"

"I'm right here, Bandit 1," said Patricia as she limped over, "and it was seven, more or less."

"Well, anyway, Max Kildare is the man!" said Clawd, "you'd need, like, an atomic bomb to take him out, and he's immune to radiation."

"Am I really that famous?" Max asked.

"And infamous," said Cleo, "now I remember. In some Monster circles, you're considered a murderer and a terrorist."

"Well, some of us think he's a hero," said Clawd.

"A hero, is he?" Cleo asked. She then looked at Max with suspicious minds, "just how many werewolves and vampires have you killed?"

"Just those that murder innocent people," said Max, "those who inflict pain and suffering to satisfy their needs."

"It's true," said Laura, "some werewolves do cross the line and kill Normies for food and for fun. Most of the time they're infected with a mutation of rabies that drives them into killing frenzies, other times they're just plain homicidal psychopaths. Same goes for vampires and other Monsters whom give in to the darkness."

"Well, this is one werewolf who walks in the light," said Clawd, "and so is this little vamp here!"

"Just as soon as they make a strong enough sun block," said Draculaura.

At that Ghoulia moaned something, while typing a reminder into her I-Coffin.

"Ghoulia, you're doing too much to invent sun screen for vampires," said Cleo.

"You're an inventor?" Malcolm asked.

At that, Ghoulia moaned something while nodding. She then activated her translation app on her phone and moaned again, 'I'm also a big fan of comic books.'

"Monsters really are people too," said Tess, "and considering how many evil monsters my friends and I had to fight, that's saying something."

"You've fought a lot baddies?" Deuce asked.

"A while back we fought a bunch of monsters that could become the size of skyscrapers," said Riku.

At that Cleo, Deuce, Draculaura, Clawd and Ghoulia looked at each other with nervous eyes.

"Was it something I said?" Riku asked.

"No, it's just..." said Draculaura, but her words failed her.

"One of our friends, he can grow as big as a skyscraper too," said Clawd, "but he's not a bad guy, honest!"

"Andy just has a problem with his powers," said Cleo.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Exactly," said Draculaura, "Andy's body reacts to negative emotions and he turns into a huge, hairy beast of mass destruction when angered. But other than that he's a good guy."

"And empathic ability," said Laura, "fascinating. I'd like to talk to this Andy."

"He's out of town," said Cleo, "he left a few weeks back to travel the world, hoping to find other Monsters like him."

"It's a shame that he left," said Clawd, "our school, Monster High, it's a place where all kinds of Monsters get together to learn."

"It's all about tolerance, understanding, friendship and all that cool stuff," said Deuce.

"That's awesome," said Sora.

"And what's sad is that Andy really fit in at school," said Draculaura, "once he got used to modern technology."

"This guy spent a hundred years on an island in the middle of nowhere," said Clawd, "but he adapted pretty quickly."

"And found true love," said Draculaura happily.

"Frankie said that she's not sure if it's love yet," said Cleo, "and neither is Andy."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Yes, I was getting to that," said Cleo, "and he won't be able to settle down until he's sure he's the only one of his kind in the world."

"So he's set out to find other empaths," said Max, "well, he should have come see us. The Bureau has more empaths employed than anyone else in the world."

"There's about three dozen privately funded supernatural investigation agencies in the world," said Laura, "some employ Meta Humans who want to earn a dollar. And then there's the thousands and thousands of amateur paranormal investigators whom have no idea what they're messing around with, and most of those idiots are doing it just to be on television."

"And sometimes they actually run into something that goes bump in the night," said Max, "and when that happens, we end up cleaning up the mess left over."

"Trust me," said Laura, "it's not a pretty sight."

Just then everyone with an earpiece heard Julia call in, "Ms. Flamingo to Mother Goose and everyone else!" she said in a joyful tone, "Lady Deathwish is in the house! Repeat! Lady Deathwish is in the house!"

"Confirm!" shouted John, "Jill's back!"

"Jill!?" exclaimed Max. Just then he looked towards the gallery entry and saw a woman standing there. She was about his age with long black hair, hazel eyes and wearing an orange and blue shoulderless gown with a blue silk wrap around her arms.

"Jill!" Max shouted happily. He then ran over to the woman, Jill Sparrow and scooped her up into a whirling hug.

"Nice to see that you still love me, Max," said Jill, speaking in a London accent.

"As if I could ever stop loving the sister I never had," said Max happily. At that time all the other Bureau agents crowded around Jill, happily expressing their joy at her return.

"Yes, yes, I'm back," said Jill once her friends and coworkers gave her a chance to speak, "and I didn't come alone."

Just then Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm, Cleo and the Monsters, whom had walked over, noticed three individuals standing at the gallery entry.

The first was a girl, about 15 years old, with long brown hair tied back with a ribbon, brown eyes and wearing a blue and gold dress with lace trimming. The second was a boy, about 13, with short black hair, brown eyes behind glasses and wore a black and red sports coat and tie. The third was a baby girl, about 2 years old or so, with short brown hair, blue eyes and wearing a blue and white dress, and was being carried by the first girl.

"Everyone," said Jill as she smiled brightly, "this is Violet, Klaus and Sunny, my adopted children."

This caused all the Bureau personnel to launch into a confusing din of surprised shouts, peppering Jill with questions as to when she adopted the three children, why, as well as shouts of congratulations and well wishes. And all the while, the three children stood at the entry way with nervous looks on their faces.

"I know those three," said Cleo, "They're the famous Baudelaire Orphans."

"You mean the kids who had their parents murdered by that rotten old actor who tormented them in order to swindle his way into the family fortune?" Draculaura asked.

"The same," said Cleo.

"One thing at a time!" Jill managed to shout above her friends and coworkers, "now, first things first," she then looked at the three children and beckoned them forward. Cautiously, the three walked up to Jill.

"Everyone, say hello to Violet, Klaus and Sunny," said Jill, "and don't overwhelm them, they've been through enough misery already."

"Hello," said Violet nervously.

"Greetings and salutations," said Klaus.

The baby, Sunny, then burbled something, which Klaus translated as 'Hi there.'

One by one the BPRD agents introduced themselves to the three orphans and little by little, the three children began to relax and smile.

At the same time, Jill was talking with her fellow Bureau operatives, while Sora, Cleo and the others were within earshot. "You want to

know what happened?" Jill asked, "I'll tell you. Let's see, in my last postcard, I was at my private bungalow at Miami Beach, just enjoying myself, when I received a subpoena to report to the district court house. Apparently, I was chosen to be the next legal guardian of The Baudelaire Siblings."

"How'd that happen?" Felicia asked.

"My family and The Baudelaire's go way back," said Jill, "in fact, I babysat Violet and Klaus when they were little, before I joined The Bureau. What with all the world saving, demon vanquishing and rogue Monster slaying we've been fighting, I completely lost track of them. It came as a complete shock to me when I learned Bertrand and Beatrice Baudelaire had been murdered by the insidious Count Olaf, and also unaware of the plight of Violet, Klaus and Sunny, whom were being passed from one incompetent legal guardian after another, while being tormented by Olaf and his cabal of really awful actors.

"When I learned I was their next guardian, I was both surprised and happy, but also sad to learn that two friends of my family were dead, and then I was angry to learn how Violet, Klaus and Sunny had been mistreated, and when I mean mistreated, not only do I mean the evils of Olaf, but also the incompetence of their many guardians and let's not forget the stupidity of Mr. Poe, the executor of the Baudelaire estate, though why anyone would give a banker power of attorney is beyond my understanding.

"Anyway, I made a few inquiries and when it came time to meet with Violet, Klaus and Sunny, I was instantly infatuated with them. Here were three children whom had literally been dragged through hell several times over. Considering the horrors they've been through, it's a miracle they're still alive and sane. Well, I assured Violet and her siblings that I would never do anything to hurt them, nor would I ever allow them to come to harm, especially if it's Olaf."

"How can you make that promise?" Cleo asked, "Count Olaf, while he is one of the worst actors to ever live, he is a master of disguise."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"That's right," said Deuce, "the rotten jerk has been running from the law for years and hasn't been caught yet."

"Let him try to hurt Violet, Klaus and Sunny on my watch," said Jill in a serious tone. Sora and the others then saw a look of outraged anger in her eyes, "let that horrible old man try to ooze his way into our lives, earn my trust and then do away with me. Things both human and inhuman have been trying to kill me for over a decade, they haven't succeeded yet," she then walked right up to Cleo and got right in her face, "and I'll thank you, Ms. de Nile, if you and your fellow students refrained from supporting one a man whose wickedness rivals that of Adolf Hitler!"

"As if we'd ever side with *that* Normie," said Deuce, "show me where he is and I'll petrify him, then smash him to pieces."

"I'll track him down and rip him apart," said Clawd.

"I prefer not to spill any blood," said Draculaura, "no matter how evil that blood is. On the other hand, we could use a pickle barrel."

"A pickle barrel?" Sora asked.

"Well, what else are you going to use to carry the salt water?" Draculaura asked.

"You've lost me," said Clawd, while Deuce shook his head and Ghoulia shrugged her shoulders.

"Okay, it's like this," aid Draculaura, "assuming we can find and catch Olaf, we bring in a pickle barrel, throw the jerk into the barrel and fill it with salt water. He then drowns in the pickle barrel, then we dump the body in the middle of the desert."

"That's both crazy and brilliant," said Tess, "why didn't I ever think of doing someone in that way?"

"When you've been around as long as I have," said Draculaura as she smiled mischievously, "you learn how to think outside the box."

Ghoulia then moaned something, while miming biting into something.

"Oh my Ra, Ghoulia! That's just disgusting!" said a shocked Cleo, "you don't eat people!"

Ghoulia then used her translator app, 'I know, and I know I can't infect anyone if I do bite them. I just want to bite Olaf's throat out.'

"Oh, well, that makes more sense," said Cleo.

"What do zombies eat if not people?" Riku asked.

Ghoulia then moaned and was translated as, 'lots and lots of fast food. All those carbohydrates, sugars and calories are the perfect fuel for the brain.'

"Yes, well," said Jill, "anyway, after the judge granted custody of the children to me, I flat out told Mr. Poe that his services were no longer required, that my lawyers would handle the Baudelaire estate from now on and that I would formally adopt Violet, Klaus and Sunny. To say that Mr. Poe was unhappy to be sacked would be an understatement and he made it very clear that he wouldn't stand to be shoved aside.

"I told him that he was lucky to be just sacked. If I had my way, I'd crucify his incompetent ass, rip him off the cross before he was dead and fed him to a pack of vermin. I also told him that he needed to see a doctor about that cold of his. That's when he got really upset and threatened to have me arrested for making threats. I told him that if he ever came within fifty feet of the children, I'd break his legs," at that Jill smiled, "That's when he ran for the hills."

"Weren't the kids upset to see him go?" Patricia asked.

"They couldn't care less," said Jill, "after that, it was just a matter of making a few phone calls, signing the adopting papers and we've been one big happy family ever since."

"I'm so happy for you, Jill," said Laura, "and you look fabulous."

"Seriously, you're glowing like the sun," said Max.

"I can honestly say that I'm the happiest I've been in a long time," said Jill, "so, what's this about the very last Necronomicon?"

"It's all her father's fault!" snapped Max as he pointed an accusing finger at Cleo. "He's the rich bastard who stopped us from destroying the book!"

"What?! How dare you!" exclaimed Cleo, "my father was a king in the old world! And he only wanted The Necronomicon preserved for its historical value."

"Or maybe he wanted the book for himself," said Leon in an accusing tone.

"You have to admit, Cleo," said Clawd, "it's kinda suspicious that your dad wants this evil book so badly."

"If anyone wants to use the book for evil, it's Nefera," said Cleo, "not my father!"

"No one is ever touching the book again," said Patricia, "we've made sure that it'll never fall into the wrong hands, or the right hands for that matter. The security system is fully automatic so that no hands, human or Monster, will ever get near the book."

"Well, just to be safe, mind if I help out tonight?" Jill asked.

"You're still on leave," said Patricia, "but, there's no reason why you can't help as a consultant. Welcome back, Fine Edge."

At that Jill blinked in surprise, "that's the code name they picked for me?"

Just then everyone heard Tyler on their earpieces, "it's what the computer picked."

"Sorry, Jill," said Patricia, "you're stuck with it."

"Whatever," said Jill, "anyway, after we get back to Washington, I'm going to completely redecorate my flat for Violet, Klaus and Sunny . They'll each have their own customized room and whatever they need. Violet will have her own workshop for her inventions, Klaus will be able to start his own private library, while Sunny will have the best teething toys on the market, and plenty of finger paint to boot."

Ghoulia then moaned something that was translated as, 'I heard that Violet was an inventor.'

"She's a genius," said Jill as she smiled happily, "why, just this morning, she was tinkering with some declassified files I showed her and is making a new device for The Bureau."

"You showed her our files!?" Max asked irately.

" *Declassified* files!" Jill insisted, "and yes, I did. I told the children what I am and what I did, and they're okay with it. That's right, I told Violet, Klaus and Sunny that I'm a Meta Human and about The Bureau, and they accepted it. In fact, they want in."

"I beg your pardon?" Patricia asked.

"They want to join The Bureau," said Jill, "they want to use their talents to fight the forces of darkness. Violet already has ideas for new equipment, tools and gadgets, while Klaus can remember every single word of every single book he reads. I told him he would be perfect in the Bureau archives."

"We have been needing a new archivist," said Aaron in a matter off act tone, "we've been meaning to digitize our paper files for years now. A young man with perfect word recall would be just the right person for the job."

"And the guys in Research and Development would love to see some of Violet's ideas," said Laura.

"Well, yeah, those are good points," said Patricia, "but what about Sunny? She's a toddler for crying out loud! The Bureau isn't a day care center."

"Sunny is more capable than most children five times her age," said Jill, "and she's just as smart, you just need to get past the fact that she's still learning to properly talk. Violet and Klaus understand just fine and I'm learning how to understand her."

"You're really serious about this, aren't you?" Max asked.

"I am," said Jill as she confidently crossed her arms, "I promised Violet, Klaus and Sunny that I would keep them safe from Olaf and anyone else who wishes them harm. What safer place is there than The Bureau? I say, let him try to harm them. I'll kill anyone, be they human, Meta Human, Monster, demon or anything else that tries to hurt my new children!"

"That's a bold statement," said Deuce.

"I think we need to just take a step back and think about this," said Patricia.

"We can think about it later," said Leon, "it's almost 8:00."

"The unveiling, crap!" snapped Patricia. She then limped over to the middle of the gallery and the covered display. She then raised her voice so everyone in the gallery could hear her.

"If I may have everyone's attention, please. Thank you. Tonight, we are here to unveil a historical artifact with a rather colorful history, and by colorful, I mean various shades of blood. Yes, The Necronomicon has been the source of much suffering in human history. Nevertheless, it is history and history must be preserved so we can learn from it, for when we forget the past, we risk making mistakes in the future.

"And so, honored historians, scholars and patrons of history, it is my privilege to introduce... The Necronomicon."

The covering on the display then dissolved as if by magic and there inside a glass box atop an alabaster plinth was a book with a black leather covering that had several strange runes inscribed on it.

The assembled human guests made awed expressions and clapped. They all then moved closer to get a better look.

"So, that's it," said Malcolm as he also got closer, "and it's the real deal, right?"

"You bet your sweet ass is it," said Patricia as she limped up to Malcolm, "take a long, good look, kido, for after tonight, it'll never be seen again by living eyes."

"I honestly don't see what the big deal is about," said Cleo as she, Deuce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia got closer to the book, "it's not that impressive, and it doesn't even look that old."

"This coming from someone who messes with ancient magic all the time?" Laura asked.

"I do not use magic all the time," said Cleo, "true, I occasionally use a rare idol or amulet, but only for important things."

"You tried to use a teleportation idol in order to be the first in line at a sale," said Clawd.

"It was a really important sale!" Cleo insisted. "And I would have been first in line if it hadn't been for Slow Moe!" she then glared at Ghoulia, "and just what was it that he wanted to buy for you so badly?"

Ghoulia moaned something as she pulled out a silver and emerald locket shaped like a heart. She opened it, revealing an inscription that was barely more than chicken scratches.

"I guess it was supposed to say how much Slow Moe likes Ghoulia," said Draculaura. At that Ghoulia moaned and nodded in affirmation.

"That's so sweet," said Violet as she walked over, "he must really love you."

"He does love her," said Draculaura, "but on the other hand, so does Don of the Dead. He gave Ghoulia over a hundred roses for her birthday."

"Remind me to get Draculaura a hundred and one roses for her next birthday," Clawd whispered to Deuce.

"You're taking this all rather well," said Laura to Violet, "Meta Humans, Monsters and so on."

"Any other Normie would be freaking out by now," said Deuce.

"If there's one thing being an inventor has taught me," said Violet, "is to always keep an open mind."

Just then Sora sensed an evil presence, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm also felt the same thing, and it was coming from within the room.

"Patricia," said Sora, "I think we have a problem."

"All eyes alert!" said Patricia as she touched her earpiece, "this could be it, people!" She then looked at Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, "who is it?"

"I don't know," said Riku. "But whoever's putting out the evil vibes, they're in the room right now."

"It could be anyone," said Laura, "I'm also sensing evil hearts, three to be exact, but these people are pros at masking their psychic emanations. I can't get a fix on them."

"Focus, people," said Patricia, "whoever they are, we're not going to give them the chance to even touch the book."

Sora looked at all the human guests. They all appeared to be normal people; historians, archeologists and scholars, as well as rich backers of the museum. But then he saw three rather attractive women in their early 20's. The first had waist-length platinum blond hair, green eyes and wore a blue dress. The second had short red hair, blue eyes and wore a black dress, while the third had knee-length blond hair in waves, brown eyes and wore a purple dress.

He focused more on the three women as they waited for a chance for a closer look at The Necronomicon. Sora then realized that the dark hearts he sensed were coming from the three women.

"Them," he told Patricia as he pointed at the three women, "they're the ones."

"Are you sure?" Laura asked, "I'm not getting anything from those divas."

"Wait a second," said Max, "they weren't on the guest list."

"They definitely weren't," said Cleo, "my father sent me the 411 on all the guests so I would know who to talk to and what was being talked about. Those three tasteless tramps, they aren't supposed to be here."

"Maybe they're just party crashers," said Draculaura.

"No, there's something bad about them," said Clawd as he glared irately at the three women, "there's something about them that sets my teeth on edge."

"I honestly can't tell what they are," said Laura, "if they are evil, they're blocking my attempts to scan them."

"Mother Goose to Big Brother," said Patricia, "find out who our gatecrashers are on the double! Hound Dog, run interference. Don't let them near the book."

"Rodger, Mother Goose!" said both Tyler and Steven. Sora then saw Steven walk over to the three women, carrying a tray full of Champagne glasses and began talking to them.

"He'll keep them occupied while Tyler does a background check," said Patricia, "in three minutes, we'll know who they are. Now," she tapped her earpiece, "Mother Goose to Ms. Flamingo, did you see three divas come in with the other guests?"

"Negative, Mother Goose," said Julia, "my eyes were on every guest as they came in and I did not see any gatecrashers."

"Now I know something funky is going on," said Patricia as she glared irately at the three women, who were grudgingly enduring Steven's attempt to get them interested in him.

"They're blocking me, I know it now," said Laura, "I'm sorry, Patricia, but I just can't get into their heads, not without letting them know that I'm trying to scan them."

"It's not your fault," said Patricia, "at least we know that they're not here to socialize. We may have the advantage, if we can just get a positive identification on them. The only thing we can do for now is try and keep them away from the book. If we detain them without a positive justification, if we move only on suspicion, then it could cause a serious backlash for The Bureau."

"How can you worry about Public Relations when they could try and grab the book at any minute?" Riku asked.

"Because if they're innocent," said Max, "not that we're doubting your instincts, Sora, but if the gatecrashers aren't here to steal the book and we detain them, it could lead to trouble for us, so we'll play it safe for now," he then looked at Laura, "but be ready to shatter their defenses if we need to."

"You got it," said Laura if she gave the thumbs up. "But I'd feel much better if Katina were here."

"Katina's still in rehab from her Mind Bending battle," said Max, "last I heard, she was still afraid to leave her house."

"She's actually much better," said Jill, "I saw her before coming to New York. It'll be a long time before she can return to active duty, let alone ever set foot inside The Bureau, but she's more able to live an independent life than she was a while back."

Just then Sora and the other Bureau operatives heard John urgently speaking, "uh... Mother Goose? We have a... situation here."

"Care to elaborate, Trueshot?" Patricia asked irately, "I'm in no mood for word games."

Julia then sounded off on the earpieces in an urgent tone, "Patricia, you'd better get out into the hallway right now!" There was then the sound of a brief scuffle, followed by Julia shouting, "you can't do that! Get back here!"

Just then Sora saw someone rush into the gallery, an African American woman, about Max's age with long black, braided hair, brown eyes and wearing a red shirt, blue jeans, brown boots and a tan BPRD jacket that looked like it had been in a closet for years.

"Oh my god!" exclaimed Max, "Katina!"

"Katina Jones?" Clawd asked, "the Scanner who took down Shannon Revek?"

"And almost lost her mind in the process," said Jill. She then walked up to Katina, whom was frantically looking at the faces of the human guests, while at the same time, Julia hurried into the room.

"What the bloody hell are you doing, Katina?" Jill demanded, "you're supposed to be back home in D.C."

But Katina ignored her, pushing past Jill as she glared hatefully at the human guests. "There they are!" she shouted.

"What are you talking about?" Julia asked

"Can't you see them?" Katina demanded.

"See who?" Jill asked.

Katina then pointed an accusing finger at the human guests, "Evil! Pure and simple from The Magical Dimension!"

Sora then realized that she was pointing at the three women that Steven was still talking to. By now everyone had heard Katina's shout, especially the three women. The platinum blond then shoved Steven aside and the three of them rushed for the central display case and the Necronomicon.

"No you don't!" shouted Katina as she raised her right arm and made a pushing gesture with her hand. Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm all felt a wave of psychic pressure pass through the room and the three women were knocked down. There was a triple flash of light and the three women shattered, while in their place was none other than Icy, Darcy and Stormy Trix, identical to the three dark witches that our heroes had fought twice already.

"Unbelievable!" exclaimed Sora, a shocked look on his face, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm looked equally shocked.

"Friends of yours?" Cleo asked.

"Not on your life!" said Riku.

... New Salem...

"Are you sure about this?" Kairi asked as she looked at herself in a full length mirror. She wore a green and orange spaghetti top with a blue miniskirt, blue high heels and had her hair styled to one side and wore pink eyeshadow and lip gloss.

"Absolutely," said Frankie, whom was wearing a short, black and white zigzag-patterned dress with a pink puffy coat. She had a blue obi tied with white strings as a belt, and pink fishnet stockings. Her shoes were reverse images of one another, one being grey with a black sole and the other black with a grey sole. She also sported blue lightning bolt earrings, while her long hair was pulled back into a ponytail.

"Ghoulfriend, you're gonna knock them out of the park at the club tonight!" said Clawdeen, whom was wearing a blue, green and black top with a black faux fur jacket, a purple and black skirt and gold high healed shoes. He hair had been straightened with purple highlights added.

"This is going to be a night to remember," said Lagoona, whom was wearing a blue and sea green dress with one shoulder, blue high heels and had her hair styled into more even waves.

"I just don't know," said Kairi, "I mean, this look... it's just not me."

"Are you kidding?" Clawdeen asked, "I picked out those colors and design myself."

"Is good colors," said Abbey, whom was wearing a pink and blue faded over the shoulder dress with snowflake polka dots, a pink undershirt and a 3 skirt layers that consist of bright pink, and 2 that

match the overall design. She had a furry bracelet, matching snowflake earrings, a translucent blue necklace and a translucent blue belt that rests just above the waist. Her shoes were translucent as well, with a furry type design, and spiraled heels.

"You really think so?" Kairi asked.

"I know so," said Abbey, "if you going on mountain goat hunt."

"Why would you wear something like this to hunt goats?" Kairi asked.

"Is tradition in home village," said Abbey, "at spring equinox, young boy yetis perform manhood ritual, then get dressed up in the bright colors and go out into wilds."

"That still doesn't explain why they would wear that during a goat hunt," said Kairi.

"You miss the understanding," said Abbey, "boy yetis, they're the goats. Girl yetis, they chase boys."

"Do I really want to know what happens to the boys when the girls catch them?" Kairi asked hesitantly.

"Is nothing too shocking," said Abbey, "is just the making of the baby yetis."

"Is that how you have kids?" Lagoona asked, "what about marriage? And don't the blokes have to ask the girls parents first?"

"I'm kinda curious about the manhood ritual," said Clawdeen.

"What is this 'marriage' you speak of?" Abbey asked, "and why would parents be asked the permission? Is not complicated. First day of Spring comes, boys get dressed up, girls chase them into wilds, girls catch boys, they wrestle, if girl defeats boy, they go home and start making the babies. As for manhood ritual, that is for the boys, while girls have their own womanhood ritual."

"Oh, now I get it," said Frankie, "if the girl catches the boy, they mate for life," she then frowned, "and I thought dating in America was complicated."

"You're probably just reading the wrong magazines," said Kairi, "I've seen some of your subscriptions. Trust me, you're better off without them."

Indeed, Kairi, whom had spent the night at Frankie's house, which was modeled after a mad scientist's lair, she had gotten to know more about Frankie's life; her first awkward week at Monster High at age 15, days that is, meeting her friends and her many wild escapades that were a normal part of her school. Case in point: when Draculaura's 1600th birthday came up, an old flame of hers tried to steal her heart in order to fuel his powers. It took nearly everything Frankie and the others had to free their vampiric friend from the undead rake's control and reunited her with Clawd.

And then there was the time Frankie rallied the entire Fearleading squad to win a national competition when all seemed lost. Then there was the time Frankie saved Halloween, that in itself was an adventure.

All in all, Kairi enjoyed her time at Frankie's residence, as well as the shopping trip to the local mall. But then the night was over and at the crack of dawn, there came a furious ringing of the doorbell. In came Clawdeen, Lagoona and Abbey, whom spent the day there helping Kairi get ready for the club that evening, while at the same time, Kairi told her new friends about her experiences as a Keyblade Wielder.

"Where I'm from," said Kairi as she looked at herself in the mirror again, "it usually doesn't take this long to get ready to go clubbing."

"And how many nightclubs have you been to?" Clawdeen asked.

"Not many," said Kairi, "you really don't get many chances to go clubbing when you're fighting the darkness."

"All those Heartless you fought," said Lagoona, "and those vile things, those... what did you call those tinpots?"

"Daleks," said Kairi, "not the most pleasant aliens you want to run into."

"And what about those evil vampires?" Clawdeen asked.

"Wamphyri," said Kairi, "more creatures you don't want to run into."

"I had no idea things were so bad out there," said Frankie, "on other words. I know that our world has its problems, but when you look at the bigger picture..."

"It puts things inside the perspective," said Abbey.

"More or less," said Frankie. She then smiled brightly, "but I don't want to talk about that right now."

"This night, ghoulfiend," said Clawdeen as she affectionately placed her hands on Kairi's shoulders, "is all about you."

"You're right," said Kairi, "tonight is for fun," she then looked at her new friends with serious eyes, "but first thing in the morning, we need to find a way to contact The Realms of Light. I've got friends back there whom are probably worried sick about me by now." She also knew that sooner or later she'd had to tell King Mickey that Sora and the others were gone, but she'd worry about that in the morning.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Frankie asked, "Let's go!"

A short time later found Kairi, Frankie, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Abbey, meeting up with Gill, who was wearing a blue and green disco suit, Heath, wearing a red, orange and yellow leisure suit, outside a huge nightclub with purple, green and orange neon lights forming a castle on the roof, while a blue and red neon sign flashed 'THE CRYSTA PALACE.'

Kairi could hear faint disco music from a block away, while already there was a line of not only human teenagers, but also teenaged Monsters.

"There's Romulus and his pack," said Clawdeen as she pointed to a group of werewolves, "They used to go to Crescent Moon High before transferring to our school. And those vamps over there? That's Bram Deveau and Gory Fangtell, their crew went to Belfry Prep. And don't let their snobbish, hoity toity attitude put you off, they're nice people once you get to know them."

"Just got a text from Operetta," Lagoona, "she's running late."

"Seriously?" Frankie asked, "you'd think she'd blow a fuse before missing a club opening."

"She's working some new songs and can't risk losing her inspiration," said Lagoona. "She'll join us later."

"More fun for us!" said Heath

"Any more of our friends missing out on the party?" Gill asked.

"Rochelle's babysitting her neighbor's daughters," said Lagoona as she read her messages, "Venus is at an environmental awareness meeting and Rebecca's doing maintenance on herself. Apparently all the bolts on her left side are inflamed."

"That sounds painful," said Kairi.

"You have no idea," said Frankie as her hands reflexively went to her neck bolts. "Anyway, who else is coming?"

"Jackson and Clair should be here soon," said Clawdeen as she checked her phone, "Chad too, and a definite maybe on Lilith's part."

"The others should be here soon enough," said Lagoona.

Just then three individuals approached, two boys and a girl, whom Frankie and the others all recognized.

The girl was Clair Childs, a Normie whom adopted a gothic style. She had short black hair, brown eyes with heavy black eye shadow, a pale face and black lipstick. She wore a black halter top and ankle-length skirt with black high heels and wore silver jewelry.

The first boy was Chad Lawson, an average Joe of a Normie and a bit of a nerd with a heart of gold. He had short brown hair, brown eyes, medium skin tone and wore a white shirt, black pants and shoes.

And then there was Jackson Jekyll, a cousin of Heath, and quite possibly the strangest student at Monster High. Being a Normie himself, Jackson suffered much cruelty from the more intolerant students, not to mention his shy nature and nerdy appearance made him a prime target for bullying. It was the kindness of Frankie and her friends whom helped Jackson rise above his limitations and dark secret and become a better person. Jackson had short black hair with white highlights, brown eyes and wore glasses. He had on a white shirt, blue tie and blue and white pants and shoes.

"So," said Clair as she, Chad and Jackson got in line with Frankie and the others, "this is the new Crystal Palace," she looked at the neon-lit club with appraising eyes, "eh... I've seen bigger."

"You've never been to a club like this," said Chad, "it's going to make Studio 54 look like a grade school sock hop."

"All that loud music," said Jackson nervously. He then brought his fingers up to his left ear, then his right, "I sure hope these work. Otherwise, I'm going to have to get out of here pretty quick."

"Will what work?" Lagoona asked.

"And aren't you worried about Holt coming out?" Frankie asked.

"That's why I made these special earpieces," said Jackson, "they're projecting a white noise frequency into my brain, while still allowing me to hear normally. The idea is for me to enjoy loud music without Holt ruining things."

"I thought you and Holt had worked things out," said Clawdeen.

"We're still smoothing out the edges," said Jackson, "he has his time and I have mine." He then looked at The Crystal Palace, "but, I just know that if he was let lose in a place like this, he'd wreck it."

"Or be a superstar," said a fourth individual whom was walking towards Frankie and the others, "a D.J. with Holt's talent would bring down the house in a good way."

This, as Frankie told Kairi, was Lilith von Hellscream, a niece of a famed 'Monster Expert' whom tried to stir up strife between werewolves and vampires, as well as close down Monster High. Lilith on the other hand, wasn't as big a bigot as her ruthless and cold hearted uncle, even so far as helping bridge the gap between Monsters and Normies, at least in this town.

Lilith had straw blond hair down below her shoulders, blue eyes and a beauty mark on her left cheek. She wore a leopard skin top and knee-length skirt with knee high boots.

"Anyway," said Lilith, "Frankie, darling, I heard from the rumor mill that you made a new friend the other day."

"Hey, that's right!" said Chad, looking at Kairi for the first time, "who's the new girl? And is she single?"

"Ease off, Chad," said Frankie in a serious tone, "Kairi's just passing through."

"I'm capable of explaining myself," said Kairi. She then introduced herself to Clair, Chad, Lilith and Jackson.

"So the rumors are true, you are from another world," said Jackson in an amazed tone.

"She looks human to me," said Clair.

"That's because I am human," said Kairi, "but I'm anything but a Normie."

"Neither am I," said Jackson, "I'm half Monster. Holt's the other half."

"Jackson and Holt are two halves of the same coin," Lagoona explained.

"Whenever Jackson hears loud music, he turns into Holt," said Clawdeen, "and believe me, Holt is a few eggs short of a dozen."

"You mean he's crazy?" Kairi asked.

"More like unpredictable," said Jackson, "Holt loves causing mischief, almost as much as he loves music. If anything, he'd rather crank up a party than play pranks, but he'd do both if given the chance."

"Then let's just hope that your other half doesn't come out to play," said Clair.

"While we get to have all the fun!" said Chad.

"I don't think we'll have much chance at that," said Lagoona in an irate tone as she looked ahead at the line, "guess who got here before we did?"

Kairi looked at the line. There were about fifty teenaged humans and Monsters ahead of her group, and while the line was moving at a slow but steady pace, Kairi quickly saw what it was that had annoyed Lagoona, while Frankie and the others saw as well.

"Toralei," said Gill as he saw the tiger-striped werecat and her twin minions, whom were forty places ahead of Frankie and the others.

"How'd she get ahead of us!?" Clawdeen asked angrily.

"Either cat girl steal car," said Abbey, "or she more diligent than we think."

"I'll bet she had Meowady and Purrsephany get here early and hold her place," said Frankie, "they'd do just about anything for her."

"There's friendship," said Lagoona, "and then there's blind, unhealthy loyalty."

"I'm sure it works for them," said Kairi.

"Yeah, master and slaves," said Heath, "oh, sorry, I meant 'mistress.'"

Just then Toralei looked and saw Frankie's group. The three werecats then smirked and waved at them.

"Oh, I'd give anything for one of Cleo's magic items!" said a wrathful Clawdeen.

"Don't give her the satisfaction," said Frankie, "she's just trying to get your goat."

"She not get goat," said Abbey, "no boy would allow himself caught by such rotten girl."

"She can't be that evil," said Kairi, "sure, she's a bully and a bitch, but she can't be that bad, can she?"

"Well, Toralei does have a few good points," said Frankie, "this one time, when we were in the finals of the Fearleading Mashionals, Toralei stopped Nefera from sabotaging us."

"Now, Nefera, she's evil," said Clawdeen.

"She did let Cleo go to New York," said Lagoona.

"Yeah, but this is Nefera we're talking about," said Clawdeen, "she's got to have some kind of angle going on here. I mean, since when has Nefera ever done anything nice for Cleo? Or us for that matter?"

"Wait, what's Cleo doing in New York?" Lilith asked.

"Unveiling some old book in a museum," said Heath, "she dragged Deuce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia there too."

"What book?" Chad asked, "could it be... *the* book? The Book Of The Dead?"

"Oh, brother, here we go," sighed Clair, "you and your conspiracy theories. Look, it's just a book!"

"This is no ordinary book, my friend," said Chad, "this is the most evil book to have ever existed, The Necronomicon."

"Oh, please," said Lilith, "The Necronomicon doesn't exist, not any more."

"All the copies were destroyed," said Jackson.

"There's one left," said Frankie, "and Cleo's going to be there when it's unveiled."

"I knew it was real!" said Chad happily, "I knew it!"

"Yeah, and if you keep bringing it up, I'm gonna rip your tongue out," said Clair irately.

"So, there's one Necronomicon left," said Lilith, "and The Bureau is letting it be displayed in a museum? They're just asking for trouble. They've destroyed nearly every copy of The Necronomicon and good for them. But why didn't they destroy this one?"

"We'll ask Cleo when she gets back," said Frankie.

"In the meantime," said an irate Clawdeen, "we're stuck with Toralei." By now the line had moved forward enough so that Toralei and her crew were admitted into the club. The tiger-striped werecat and her minions paid the cover charge, had their paws stamped by the doorman and they walked in, but not before Toralei smugly waved one more time at Clawdeen.

"Oh, that does it!" snapped Clawdeen, "I'm gonna rip her good!"

"You can't!" said Lagoon urgently, "not while she's in there."

"That's the beauty of The Crystal Palace," said Frankie, "no violence allowed."

"It really is a place where Monsters and Normies can have fun together," said Lagoon, "so, Clawdeen, at least try to have fun without trouble tonight, please?"

"I won't start anything," said Clawdeen, "if anyone's going to cause trouble, it'll be Toralei."

"Not true," said Abbey, "I see other trouble maker."

"Who?" Frankie asked as she looked around, "is it Manny Taur? Is he being a jerk again?"

"Not bovine boy," said Abbey, "that boy over there," she pointed across the street, where a boy, about 17 or so, with short blond hair, coal black eyes, wearing a black jacket with a strange red symbol on the right sleeve, as well as black leather pants and boots and spiked gloves, and a very irate expression on his face, stood under a street light.

"That boy," said Abbey, "he gives us the... how do you say... stink eye?"

"He does look like he's got a bone to pick with us," said Clawdeen.

"You want me to go over and turn up the heat?" Heath asked, while his hair flared up.

"Or maybe give him cold shoulder," said Abbey.

"No, just ignore him," said Lilith in an embarrassed and nervous tone as she looked away from the boy, "pretend he's not there."

"Why ignore the problem?" Kairi asked.

"If he's got issues with us," said Frankie, "we should try to resolve them before things get worse."

"Don't even try to talk to him," said Lilith, "you'll regret it."

"So he'll pick a fight," said Clawdeen, "big deal."

"All the more reason to try and talk to him," said Frankie, "work things out before they get worse."

"And if he won't listen to reason," said Kairi, "then we can use force."

"Now you're talking my language!" said Heath eagerly.

"Believe me, the last thing you want is to talk to him," said Lilith, "Frankie, if your or any other Monster tries to start a dialog with that boy, you'll regret it, big time."

"Why?" Frankie asked, "Lilith, who is that guy?"

At that Lilith looked seriously embarrassed and somewhat frightened, "his name is Lucas Vega. He's... he was my boyfriend, until he got thrown into juvie and rehab."

"He did time?" Jackson asked in a shocked tone.

"And drugs?" Clair asked in an equally shocked tone.

"It's a long story," said Lilith, "let's just say that we dated for a while, then he started using and nearly killed a few people. I may have done some pretty rotten things and acted like a real bitch, especially when it came to Monsters, but I drew the line at what Lucas did. I dumped him when he was arrested and told him that I never wanted to see or hear from him again."

"Well, he's out now," said Lagoona, "And looks madder than a dry sea turtle."

"You want me to talk to him?" Chad asked.

"He'll demolish you in a heartbeat," said Lilith, "oh crap! He's coming over here!"

Indeed, the boy, Lucas Vega, was crossing the street, making a beeline for Frankie and the others.

"Oh good God!" said Lilith. She then looked at Frankie and the others, "okay, no matter what he says, no matter what insults he throws at you, do not respond. He's been trained in a lethal style of martial arts and would tear you apart if you give him the chance."

"Are you kidding me?" Clawdeen asked.

"I wish I wasn't," said Lilith.

By now Lucas was close enough for Kairi to get a better look at him. He was heavily muscled, not like a pro weightlifter but more like a heavyweight prizefighter, while at the same time, Kairi sensed that Lucas had a large reserve of energy, not to mention a very heavy heart full of anger and hate.

"Lilith von Hellscream," said Lucas as he stopped a few paces from the group.

At that Lilith tensed up for a second, before taking a steadying breath and turned to face her former boyfriend, "so, they let you out of the

slammer. How was it on the inside? Still got your cherry?"

"I didn't get violated, if that's what you're asking," said Lucas, "but I did get the chance to work out more."

"I can see that," said Lilith irately, "so, what do you want? Here to ask me to take you back? I told you that I never wanted to see you again!"

"And I didn't want to see you either, after what you did to me!" said Lucas, "eighteen months I was in Juvenile Detention and drug rehabilitation, Lilith! Eighteen months!" he then gave a disarming smile, "But I didn't hold it against you. No, it was my own fault for getting caught."

"But then after I had gotten out, what do I hear? I heard that you were hanging with Monsters!" he then glared at Lilith with unadulterated loathing, "you filthy, ungrateful, Judas bitch!"

"What'd you call her!?" Clawdeen exclaimed as she bared her fangs and claws, while Frankie and Abbey restrained her.

"No, let it go!" snapped Lilith, "this sack of pig vomit isn't worth it."

"Neither are you!" spat Lucas, "how could you betray us like this? You betrayed your own kind!"

"And what kind is that?" Lilith asked, "human kind? Because if being human is to live in ignorance, intolerance, fear and hate, then I'd rather be a Monster!"

"If your uncle heard you say that, he'd skin you," said Lucas coldly.

"My uncle and I aren't on speaking terms right now," said Lilith, "And neither are we. So stop beating around the bush and tell me what you want," she then pulled out her cell phone, "before I call my lawyer and ask for a restraining order."

"You want to get down to brass tax?" Lucas asked, "alright, here's the deal. Despite my mistakes, we still had something, and you know it."

"It was a relationship built on superstition, ignorance and fear," said Lilith, "as well as lies perpetrated by my uncle and other bigoted people."

"I get it now," said Clair as she glared irately at Lucas, "you're a Monster Hater."

"A what?" Frankie asked.

"It means he thinks we're all slime," said an irate Clawdeen.

"You're lower than slime," said Lucas, "you're not even worth the air you're breathing."

"And you're a racist prick!" snapped Kairi, "Monsters are people too, you know."

"And you're a stupid slut for being with these pieces of filth!" snapped Lucas.

"Don't you talk that way to my friend!" exclaimed Frankie.

"Or what?" Lucas asked smugly, "you'll hit me? Touch me and I'll sue, assuming I don't break you apart defending myself."

"Just ignore this scumbag," said Kairi, "he talks tough, but he wouldn't risk getting into a fight."

"But he called you..." said Frankie.

"I know what he said," Kairi replied, "but getting upset over someone else's stupidity never did anyone any good," she looked at Lucas, "it's clear that this... individual... has some serious issues and a huge chip on his shoulder. But if he wants to be a bullying coward, let him see where it gets him."

"Oh, it's going to get me to someplace wonderful," said a viciously smiling Lucas, "someplace where freaks like that," he pointed at Frankie, "and Monster Lovers like you," he pointed at Kairi, "are put in their place."

"What is biker Normie talking about?" Abbey asked.

"Something insane and stupid," said Lilith, "something Lucas's drug addled mind dreamed up."

"Oh, it's more than a dream, Lilith von Hellscream," said Lucas, "a dream that will soon become a reality."

At that Lilith looked at Lucas with suspicious anxiety, "are you using again?" she asked in an accusing tone.

"I... what?" Lucas asked in a startled tone, "no, no! I'm not using. I haven't touched Soma-15 in over a year and a half."

"Because this whole obsession of yours started when you started using!" said Lilith, "and if you're on Soma-15 again, then..."

"I'm not on it anymore!" said Lucas, "no, I've got something else, something that will make the dream come true, and you can still be a part of it, Lilith," he then held out his hand, "come with me and we can realize the dream."

Lilith then abruptly slapped his hand away, "I'd rather be torn apart by rabid wolverines than realize your sick dream, Lucas Vega! Now get the hell out of here before I call the cops!"

"As if the police can do anything to stop me," said Lucas in a tone that spoke of reluctant acceptance, "so be it. But remember, you could have had a place in the new world. Instead, you sided with the freaks. You'll be put in your place, just like every other undesirable," he then looked at Clair, Chad, Jackson and Kairi, "a revolution is coming, so you'd better decide where you stand. With your own kind? Or with the freaks?" with that he abruptly left.

"What a dick!" said Clair as they watched Lucas walk back across the street and disappear into the shadows.

"Of all the nerve, calling us those horrible things," said Lagoona, "what crawled up his blow hole and died?"

"He's just a loudmouth bully," said Kairi, "full of hot air and empty threats."

"He's not as full as hot air as you think," said Lilith, "if we had gotten into a fight, he would most likely put a lot of us in the hospital. I would have stopped him eventually, but not before a lot of hurt was done."

"I thought you said he was trained in deadly martial arts," said Gill.

"So am I," said Lilith, "if a bunch of gang bangers tried to get me, I could kill them all before they knew it, and if I had to," she looked at Clawdeen, "I could probably put even outwrestle your brother."

"Now that's saying something," said an impressed and slightly unnerved Clawdeen.

"I never knew this," said Chad, "and we've been going to school together since like kindergarten."

"There's a lot about me that you don't know," said Lilith.

"Yeah, like the fact that you're ex is a psychopath?" Clair asked.

"He wasn't always this crazy," said Lilith, "it was a different time for me, back before I learned that Monsters are people. My uncle, he was grooming me to inherit his mantle as the world's greatest Monster 'Expert,' meaning he was raising me to fear and hate Monsters, and if things kept going the way they were going, I probably would have been just like my uncle, a ruthless, cold hearted Monster Hater."

"But you weren't so evil at Halloween," said Frankie.

"True," said Lilith, "I was already breaking away from my uncle at the time. True, I still saw the name von Hellscream as glamorous and played up my uncle's fame. But when we met at that party, I didn't want to hurt any Monsters. Prank them, now that was something else, but never hurt them."

"Lucky you felt that way," said Jackson, "otherwise Holt would have gotten the full Trick or Treatment, and me with him."

"Long story," said Clawdeen to Kairi.

"Anyway," said Lilith, "what really started to change me was when Lucas started using. Before that, he was a normal human being, unless you count the fact that he was also being raised to be a Monster Hater. His family and mine were close for generations and it was hoped that Lucas and I would one day marry.

"For a while, it looked that we would wind up together. We trained in martial arts together, took survival classes together, learned weapons and learned firsthand how evil that Monsters are from my uncle. I know now that my uncle was poisoning our minds with lies. He failed with me but Lucas was a total success.

"Then one day about nineteen months ago, my uncle was contacted by a scientist whom offered him a once in a lifetime opportunity; a non-steroid, performance enhancing drug that would make a human stronger, faster and smarter than any Monster; Soma-15. This was something my uncle had been waiting all his life for, a chance for Normies to gain an edge over Monsters."

"Good grief!" exclaimed Kairi, while Frankie and the others looked shocked, "what happened?"

"Lucas was already my uncle's obedient disciple," said Lilith, "and he had other followers, other young men and women brainwashed into become Monster Haters, but Lucas and I were his favorites. When the scientist presented my uncle with a sample of Soma-15, my

uncle asked for a volunteer to try it out, to become the first of his army of Super Soldiers that would finally put Monsters in their place."

"You didn't volunteer for this, did you?" Frankie asked hesitantly.

"I was tempted," said Lilith, "but no, I didn't ask to try Soma-15. Something about the whole situation gave me the willies, so Lucas got the drug. At first everything seemed to be going according to plan; Lucas was stronger, faster and smarter than before. But within a matter of hours of taking the drug he began hallucinating, like a combination of Marijuana, Mescaline and LSD. He went berserk and ran amuck through the town, spouting nonsense about him being the chosen one and ruling a world where Super Soldiers rule and Monsters are slaves.

"In the end, he crashed from the drug, the police nabbed him, he was tried, convicted and sent to Juvie and rehab. And now he's out and still just as crazy as I last saw him."

"He can't be serious about enslaving Monsters, right?" Frankie asked.

"Of course not," said Lilith, "it's just a stupid dream brought on by delusional psychosis. Why they even let him out of the slammer, I'll never know. No, he's harmless so long as he's alone. Even my uncle turned his back on Lucas once he realized that Soma-15 was no good."

"What about your uncle's other students?" Jackson asked.

"Yes, what of other Monster Haters in training?" Abbey asked.

"Haven't heard from any of them since Lucas was busted," said Lilith, "there were about a hundred of us, all being brainwashed by my uncle. When Lucas was arrested, the others scattered to the four winds, like they wanted nothing to do with him anymore. I mean, who would? The boy is completely sideways."

"Speaking of direction," said Gill, "we're almost at the front of the line."

Indeed, the group had less than ten people in front of them, and before too long, they paid the cover charge, had their hands stamped by the doorman and were inside.

The interior of the club contained an enormous dance floor with squares that shifted color, keeping in sync with the color-changing lights above as well as a Disco ball the size of a beach ball. The far side of the building had a massive music station where the DJ was remixing classic Disco tracks. Off to one side were a dozen karaoke rooms, the other side had a juice bar, while out on the dance floor were scores of teenaged humans and Monsters, all enjoying the fantastic music. Hovering above the dance floor was Spectra, recording the event with a digital video camera.

"Now this is what I'm talking about!" shouted Clawdeen as the DJ played a remix of 'Ain't No Stopping Us Now.'

"Come on, let's groove!" shouted Frankie. She and the others hurried out onto the dance floor and began moving to the music. Lagoona danced with Gill, Abbey with Heath, Clair with Jackson, while Lilith and Chad danced with a group of vampires and werewolves. Kairi danced with Frankie and Clawdeen.

After several sets, Kairi needed a break and went over to the juice bar and ordered a mango, strawberry smoothie. She was soon joined by Frankie and Clawdeen, while the DJ played a remix of 'The Hustle.' As she caught her breath, Kairi realized that she felt truly happy for the first time in a while. And it wasn't just from having a good time with her new friends. No, this feeling came right from her heart, as if telling her that everything was going to be alright. Even the memory of the tentacle monster and her zombified friends wasn't so fresh and traumatizing. In fact, those memories were starting to fade, like a bad dream.

"I am having so much fun!" said Frankie happily as her neck bolts sparked, which snapped Kairi out of her train of thought, "this place is so voltagious!"

"I can only imagine how much Cleo is regretting going to New York," said Clawdeen.

"I'm sure that New York has its own nightclubs for teens," said Kairi.

"Yeah, I'll bet that Cleo and Deuce sneaked away from that hoity toity party and went clubbing," said Frankie. "Ghoulia, Clawd and Draculaura too."

"That reminds me of something," said Kairi, "far from me to pry into your personal lives, but why don't you two have boyfriends? I mean, Cleo has Deuce, Draculaura has Clawd, Lagoona has Gill, Abbey has Heath, while Ghoulia is in the middle of a love triangle."

"So why are we single?" Clawdeen asked, "well, me, I just haven't found the right guy yet. Not that I haven't tried. I mean, Draculaura tried. She hooked me up with her cousin at Halloween and things were nice with me and Vlad, but we just didn't really fit together. And it wasn't because he's a vamp and I'm a werewolf."

"Then what happened?" Kairi asked.

"It's stupid really," said Clawdeen as the waiter brought over her order, a tall glass of peach and orange juice, "his family are Republicans and mine are Democrats."

"Oh, I see," said Kairi, "yeah, that could make things rough in a relationship."

Lilith then sat down with them, "I prefer to leave politics to the politicians," she said, "and if case you were wondering, Kairi, I'm single because I choose to be."

"Well, that's your choice," said Kairi. She then looked at Frankie, "but what about you? Anyone special in your life?"

At that Frankie laughed nervously, "ah, well, it's kinda a funny story. I'm only a few months old and I've had a very complicated love life. Okay, my first crush was Deuce. And it wasn't even a real crush. Okay, here's the thing; it was my first week at Monster High. I was only fifteen days old when I started and I had no idea what I was doing. All I had to guide me was my magazines."

"You really ought to stop reading some of those," said Kairi in an insisting manner, "nearly a third of your subscriptions are Larry Flint publications."

"I never really thought about it that way," said Frankie, "anyway, my first week at school was a disaster. I said all the wrong things, made all the wrong impressions, made Cleo dislike me, I was on my way to being the social pariah of the millennium. Just when I had finally gotten Cleo to give me another chance, she asked me if I had a boyfriend. I panicked and said the first boy I thought was cute, Deuce. I had no idea that he and Cleo were soul mates and when I said his name it nearly broke Cleo's heart."

"It took us a while to calm Cleo down and straighten things out," said Clawdeen, "but in the end, Cleo accepted Frankie, as if Frankie needed Cleo to be accepted. Me, Lagoona, Draculaura and Ghoulia, we were already friends with her."

"I knew you were all connected the moment I woke up," said Kairi.

"Well, that was my first crush," said Frankie, "but then a few weeks later, I had another crisis. I read in a magazine that having a boyfriend was essential, and seeing that nearly all my friends had a special someone, I felt that I wouldn't fit in without one. I panicked again and told my friend that I already had one, so to save face, I made one when I went home that day."

"The end result was Hoodude Voodoo," said Clawdeen.

"That walking doll I saw at school?" Kairi asked, "the one with the pins in him?"

"Yeah, that was really embarrassing," said Frankie, "just when Clawdeen and the others told me that it was alright that I didn't have a boyfriend, Hoodude became self aware and he took my breaking up with him really hard. Now, whenever something happens to him, he doesn't get hurt but anyone around him does."

"Like a real voodoo doll," said Kairi, "ouch."

"To say the least," remarked Frankie, "and then I had a crush on both Jackson and Holt. At first it was just Jackson. I thought he was just a shy, quiet, smart Normie whom happened to be at Monster High because he's Heath's cousin. We were supposed to go to a party together but he never showed. Instead, Holt showed up and... well... it was electricity between us, for real."

"She used her own power to keep the music going," said Clawdeen.

"Anyway," said Frankie, "that's how things went with me with Jackson and Holt. One would disappear and the other would show up. But then I found out that the two are the same person, opposite sides of the same coin. They both had me choose between them, so I chose to remain single rather than have a great guy be at war with himself. I'm still friends with both of them, but Jackson is much better to be around with."

"You mean he's less annoying than Holt," said Clawdeen, "don't get me wrong, Holt has his good points; he loves music and art, and he really cares for Frankie, but the boy really is a trouble maker." She then looked at Frankie, "which brings us to your current crush."

"Oh, right, Andy," said Frankie in an embarrassed, "he's... special, in more ways than one. We met during Spring Break. We were going to meet with Lagoona's parents when we were shipwrecked by a kraken. We wound up on a desert island where Andy had been marooned for a hundred years."

"How long do Monsters live?" Kairi asked. "I mean, Draculaura's over a thousand years old, while Cleo's probably over three thousand."

"That's a good question," said Frankie. She then looked at Clawdeen, "how long do Monsters live?"

"It varies from Monster to Monster," said Clawdeen, "but most of us are young for a long time."

"Andy was left on the island because he has a really unique power," said Frankie, "he senses other people's emotions and reacts to them in a really big and kinda scary way."

"How bad could it be?" Kairi asked.

"Negative emotions turn Andy into a giant beast the size of a skyscraper," said Clawdeen.

"He really doesn't want to be a hulking beast of mass destruction," said Frankie, "all Andy wants is to be accepted as a person and not be treated like a freak. Which is why Monster High is perfect for him. This is the only school in the world where Monsters of all shape and size can come together and be themselves."

Frankie then sighed, "but he still reacts to negative emotions; fear, hate, anger, sorrow, whether its directed at him or not. That's why he left a few weeks ago. He's traveling the world, going from one Monster community to the next, hoping to find someone with the same ability to sense emotions, someone whom can teach him how to control his power."

"You must really like him," said Kairi.

"I do," said Frankie, "I never felt such a deep connection with anyone before, and I'm still less than a year old. But I... I just don't know for sure if he and I are truly meant for each other. We keep in regular contact, exchanging emails of our escapades and such, but I'm

afraid that he will find someone like him out there, someone whom will make him want to settle down, someone who'll make him forget about me."

"Listen to me and listen well," said Kairi in a serious tone, "I've been around enough to know that if you love someone, truly love someone, and that someone truly loves you back, then nothing, and I mean *nothing*, not even death, can shatter that love."

"Really?" Frankie asked.

"I've seen all sorts of rotten, insane, evil things try to prove me wrong," said Kairi, "they've all failed."

Just then Clawdeen's ears perked up as she heard something familiar to her, "wait a second," she said as she looked out onto the dance floor, "is that... it is!"

Kairi and Frankie looked and saw what Clawdeen was glaring at. There on the floor, Romulus, the alpha werewolf of the local pack, was dancing with a she-wolf with tan skin, bright orange hair, yellow eyes and wearing an orange tank top with a blue sleeveless jacket, a black skirt, multi-colored stockings and black platform shoes.

"Why's Howleen dancing with Romulus?" Frankie asked.

"I don't know," said an irate Clawdeen, "but if that mutt Romulus has anything but the best of intentions in mind, I'll skin him!"

"Oh, let them enjoy themselves," said Kairi, "they're just dancing."

"Well, alright," said Clawdeen as she relaxed, "but I'm keeping an eye on them!"

Just then there was a disturbance out on the dance floor. Frankie, Clawdeen, Lilith and Kairi all heard Jackson shouting, "oh no! The batteries are dieing!"

Kairi then saw Clair trying to hurry Jackson out of the club, but then there was a flash of transformation light and Jackson was gone. In his place was a Monster of equal height and build and similar facial features, but that's where the similarities ended. Holt had electric blue skin, flame red hair with tinges of orange and yellow and a black tattoo next to his left eye. He wore a black and white shirt, purple and black striped pants, a red jacket with flamed sleeves and a set of headphones around his neck.

"Alright!" exclaimed Holt eagerly, "DJ Holt Hyde is in the hizzy! Yeah!" with that he leapt over Clair, grabbed one of the overhead lamps then launched himself at the disco ball, then used that to launch himself at the disk jockey, knocking him away from the music station.

"Let's crank this party up to eleven!" shouted Holt as he turned the volume up and switched to a more fast paced song. This seemed to get the crowd more excited and everyone was enjoying the new music.

"Yeah!" shouted Holt, "this remix is going out to my gal, Frankie 'Fine' Stein! Her and her fabulously foxy friend!"

"He's still carrying a torch for me," said Frankie, "that's kinda sweet, I guess."

"At least he knows beauty when he sees it," said Kairi.

"Oh man," said Clair as she glared irately at Holt, "this stinks worse than a raw egg in an old shoe in a chicken coop."

"At least he's not making a mess of things," said Frankie as she, Clawdeen, Kairi and Lilith began moving to the new beat.

"He's ruined my date," said Clair, "you know, I'll bet that Holt sabotaged those earpieces so he could come out. He and Jackson aren't on the best terms, you know."

"Well, at least he's making things more enjoyable for everyone else," said Kairi.

"Yeah, everyone's having a great time," said Frankie.

Just then there came a scream from the building entrance. The dancers stopped and saw first one, then another Monster being tossed to the floor like potato sacks, both of them looking heavily beaten and bloodied.

Then at least twenty human teenagers, fifteen boys and five girls, all of them between sixteen and nineteen, all of them wearing black leather jackets and spiked gloves, walked in with looks of vicious glee on their faces. And right in front of the black-jacketed humans was Lucas, a look of vile vindication on his face.

"Lucas!" exclaimed an outraged Lilith, "what the hell are you doing?!"

"I warned you, Lilith," said Lucas, "I warned you that the revolution was coming. But I didn't tell you that it was starting tonight, right here, right now."

"I stand corrected," said Clair, " *this* sucks worse than a raw egg in an old shoe in a chicken coop, and a brown egg at that."

"That's a bold statement," said Clawdeen.

... Hogwarts...

"And that, my friends," said Andrew, "is the secret to the perfect chocolate soufflé."

For the past twenty-four hours and more, Andrew had been keeping Aiden, Roxas and Naminé occupied in the Hogwarts kitchens. When they weren't seating, sleeping or bathing, they were taking notes on Andrew's recipes for beef, pork, chicken, turkey, as well as various fruit, vegetable and soup courses, various confectionaries and

deserts. He also taught them about seasonings, how a little more or a little less of an herb or spice could make an ordinary dish into something extraordinary.

Aiden, Roxas and Naminé were also impressed by all the House Elves working in the kitchens.

"They're so nice and friendly," said Naminé, "and they have absolutely no problem working for nothing."

"As long as they're happy then they don't mind a life of servitude," said Andrew, "it's just how they are." he then chuckled, "I remember hearing about Hermione's attempts to 'free' the House Elves. Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare."

"Spew?" Roxas laughed, while Aiden and Naminé also giggled.

"She really hated it when Ron and Harry bugged her about it," said Andrew, "anyway, S.P.E.W. didn't go anywhere, but then after Voldemort and the Death Eaters were wiped out, Hermione went into Magical Law and helped secure more rights for House Elves, as well as ensuring that anyone who abuses them will be punished."

"Now that's what I call social progress," said Aiden.

Just then Jill ran into the kitchen, startling a few House Elves, "sorry, am I interrupting anything? Oh, excuse me," she then walked over to a nearby sink and washed her hands, "mustn't contaminate the workspace."

"You don't have to remind us," said Roxas as he, Naminé and Aiden looked at their hands, which were somewhat dried out from the multiple times Andrew had them wash up.

"A clean kitchen is a healthy kitchen," said Andrew, "I'm just glad that House Elves don't carry human diseases. So, what's up, Jill?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Jill, "Violet's starting to have morning sickness, in the middle of the day no less."

"Good grief," sighed Andrew, "here we go again."

"At least it's quick," said Jill as she walked over and sampled one of Andrew's dishes, "one good chuck and she's right as rain, until the next time that is. Oh my God! You're making Jambalaya! And is that Yorkshire Pudding?" with that she grabbed a plate and began eating.

"I know you so well," said Andrew.

"Oh, and before I forget," said Jill in between bites, "the multi-dimensional scanner is here. Ashley's getting it set up in The Great Hall."

"What!?" exclaimed Aiden, Roxas and Naminé. With that they ran out of the kitchen like bats out of hell.

"That's gratitude for you," said Andrew as he pulled up a chair next to Jill, "I teach them how to cook and they abandon me."

"At least you've still got me," said Jill, "pass the candied yams, would you, dear?"

"I could never refuse you anything, darling," said Andrew.

Aiden, Roxas and Naminé reached The Great Hall in record timing. They saw that two of the House Tables had been removed, while in the empty space, the multi-dimensional scanner was being assembled.

The machine was actually three machines, each a cube of metal and blinking lights about five feet on each side. The top face of each cube had a device shaped like an old fashion movie projector. Attached to each device were various cables that connected to a larger cube that had several antenna sticking out on all sides, and

that was connected to a series of laptops that were tied into a master laptop that Ashley was working at. The whole thing was connected to a 4ft cube that was clearly the power supply.

Also in the room was Tara, Cass, Alison, Kylie, Matthew, Cordelia, Ryo and Lancaster, as well as Max, Leon, Aaron, Neville, Harry and McGonagall.

"The big cube is the actual scanner," said Ashley as she typed into the master laptop, "once it is fully online, it will begin scanning time and space for our missing friends. When it's located them, it'll be able to home in on them and with the imagers," she indicated the three cubes with movie projectors, "we'll get a three dimensional view of what they're doing."

"Are you sure these things will work?" Tara asked, "Muggle machines don't work at Hogwarts."

"I'm well aware of that," said Ashley, "but the viewing device has been shielded against magic. It'll work. If it doesn't, there'll be a lot of law suits filed, but that's for later. Any other questions?"

"Who pays for all of this?" Matthew asked.

"You'd be surprised where The Bureau gets its funding," said Ashley.

"How long will it take to find Sora and the others?" Aiden asked.

"As long as it takes," said Ashley, "the machine will first scan the alternate realities that The Bureau has already made contact with. Beyond that we'll scan the rest of the multi-verse, and it's a pretty big multi-verse, so it's going to be a while."

"Remind me," said Leon, "just how many alternate Bureaus have we made contact with?"

"Seventy-nine last time I checked," said Max.

"Eighty-one," said Ashley.

"Well, aren't you special," said Leon.

Just then a green icon on Ashley's laptop appeared, "everything's ready," she then hit ENTER, "and now it's scanning."

"Are you sure?" Aiden asked as he looked at the scanner, "it doesn't sound like it's working."

"It's supposed to be quiet," said Ashley, "and the power supply," she indicated the smaller cube, "it's good for five days before recharging, and don't ask me how that works, the physics behind it would melt your eyeballs."

"Thanks for putting that image in my brain," said Aiden.

Just then the computer began beeping. "That was quick," said Ashley, "it's found Sora and the others."

"Really!?" exclaimed Naminé, "Where are they?!"

"Hang on," said Ashley, "I said the machine has located our friends, that was the easy part. Projecting their images across time and space, that's going to take a little longer.

"I don't know how much more of this I can stand," said Naminé as she, Roxas and Aiden slumped to the floor.

Just then Andrew and Jill walked in, "found them yet?" Jill asked.

"The computer is getting an exact fix as we speak," said Ashley, "though I can't guarantee it will be 100% accurate. This machine has never been used in a magical environment like Hogwarts before. There's no telling how long the shielding will last before it succumbs to The Hogwarts Effect."

"When'd you come up with that?" J.D. asked as he walked in, "that's good, The Hogwarts Effect."

"Well, what else are you going to call a phenomenon where there's so much magic in the air, it discombobulates technology," said Ashley. Just then the computer beeped again, "okay, the machine has found Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm. It's still working on finding Kairi, but the first four are alive and safe... and in Manhattan no less."

"What are they doing in New York City?" Max asked.

"We'll find out soon enough," said Ashley, "the dimensional projectors are coming on line. In a few seconds, we'll have a 3D view of whatever mess Sora and the others are in."

The projectors then formed a hologram of Sora, Malcolm, Riku and Tess at the gala.

"A party, I should have known," said Aiden in a relieved tone, while Roxas and Naminé also sighed with relief, "here we are all worried sick about them and they're at a party."

"And guess who else is there?" Jill asked as she looked at the gala attendees.

"That's you, Max!" said Tara, "and Leon, Aaron and Laura Hurst."

"Ken Somerset!" said an astonished Jill, "Julia Eckhart, Felicia Valentine, Steven Austin. They're all here, alive and well."

"And alternate versions of J.D., Jessie, John and Rebecca," said Andrew, "but I don't see Harry anywhere."

"I'd rather not see an alternate version of myself, thanks," said Harry, "one of me is more than enough."

"Hey, isn't that... it is! Patty Walker!" said Andrew, "she was one of the best Meta Human field agents outside The Ramblers, before settling into administration."

"Look at her broach," said Jill, "you see that broach Patricia's wearing?"

"Yeah, it's pretty," said Naminé.

"But what of it?" Aiden asked, "other than it's gold and silver?"

"The pattern of gold and silver," said Jill, "the administration of the Bureau uses coded jewelry when in public, partly to show bureaucratic rank, but mostly because it looks good. Patricia's broach, that's the code for a Deputy Director."

"Our Patricia's only an Assistant Director," said Aaron, "and she only went into administration five years ago," he looked at the 3D hologram, "but this Patricia looks like she suffered a disabling accident not too many years past. Also, our alternate selves appear to be at least seven years younger than we are."

"So, Sora and the others went back in time as well as in space?" Roxas asked.

"Maybe so," said Ashley as she looked at a new data window on her laptop, "but maybe not. According to the scanner, the events we're seeing are taking place in the present. Our now is there now."

"But how can we be our age and our alternates are younger?" Leon asked.

"I believe I know," said Cass, "while the day we are seeing is the same as ours, it's possible that the sequence of events are seven years past."

"You mean what happened to us in the past is happening to them right now?" Naminé asked.

"I feel like if I think about this too hard, my head will explode," said Roxas in a miserable tone.

"It's not that complicated," said Cass, "different realities have different flows of time, and sequences of events."

"How do you know all of this?" Aiden asked.

"I saw something similar on an episode of Sliders," said Cass. At that her fellow students looked at her like she just said something crazy, "what?" she asked, "just because I'm a Pure Blood doesn't mean I can't enjoy Muggle television, especially classics from the 20th century."

"I'll be damned," said Max in an astonished tone, "I think I know what's happening on the other world. This is the night The Necronomicon was stolen."

"And we went through hell to get it back," said Leon.

"And now Sora and the others are caught up in the nightmare," said Jill in a serious tone, "before The Necronomicon is recovered, a lot of our friends will die."

"What are you talking about?" Aiden asked, "I thought The Necronomicon was destroyed."

"It was," said Jessie as she walked in, "I was there when the last one was destroyed on this world," she then touched her scars, "but not before being benched for possible eye damage. Harry, Max and the others waited for me to be cleared for duty before destroying the book," she then saw her alternate self in the 3D image, "hmm, no scars, that'll change soon enough. Anyway, the last copy was destroyed, but it wouldn't have been stolen if it hadn't been put on display in The American Museum of Natural History."

"Which is where Sora and the others are right now," said Andrew as he looked at his watch, "and if my timing is right, Jill, you and I are going to walk into the gallery with Violet, Klaus and Sunny in exactly... thirty seconds."

"I can't wait to see what my other self wears for the gala," said Jill.

"But why was the last copy of The Necronomicon put on display?" Aiden asked.

"Some rich bastard with an amateur history fetish wanted it preserved for historical reasons," said Leon, "at least that's what happened on our world."

Just then in the image, Jill walked into the gallery with Violet, Klaus and Sunny.

"My dress was better," said Jill as she watched her younger self.

"And apparently I'm dead in this world," said Andrew, "or missing, or I never existed at all."

"I wish we could hear what's going on," said Roxas as he and the others watched the other Jill talk to Sora and the others.

"And who are those five with Sora?" Naminé asked as she looked at Cleo, Deuce, Draculaura, Clawd and Ghoulia.

"No idea," said Max.

"Well, here's something else for you to think about," said Andrew as he looked at his watch, "any minute now, Katina's gonna rush in."

"Katina Jones?" Max asked, "my god, I haven't thought about her in nearly a decade."

"Wasn't she that really powerful Scanner who burned her mind out back in '03?" Kylie asked.

"She sacrificed herself to destroy Shannon Revek," said Harry, "that's something I'll never forget."

"This is stupid!" snapped Aiden, "why can't we hear what they're saying?!"

"I'm working on the audio," said Ashley, "you should be grateful that you can see anything. Looking into alternate realities isn't like looking out the window, you know."

As if in response, the 3D image flickered like bad reception for a few seconds before stabilizing.

"Dimensional interference," said Ashley as she furiously typed into her laptop, "we could get more and possibly lose the picture."

Just then Katina rushed into the gallery.

"What did I tell you!?" exclaimed Andrew triumphantly, "memory like an elephant!"

"I forgot how beautiful Katina was," said Max in a longing tone as he looked at the image of the returned Scanner.

"You liked her?" Naminé asked.

"I did," said Max, "but I was so focused on keeping the world safe, I never found the time to tell Katina how I felt."

"Hold that thought," said Andrew, "Katina's about to unmask the thieves. Will it be the same doomsday cult who tried to steal The Necronomicon in our timeline? Or someone else?"

Everyone then saw Katina point an accusing finger at three women whom then rushed for The Necronomicon, then Katina hit them with a mind blast. The illusion was shattered and The Trix were revealed.

"Son of a bitch!" exclaimed a horrified Aiden.

"Friends of yours?" Harry asked.

"Not on your life," said Naminé.

The end of chapter 3.

Next chapter finds Sora, Kairi and their respective groups fighting their respective fights. Who will triumph and who will fall? Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Dual Conflict

Last time found Sora and the gang with The Bureau as they guarded the unveiling of The Necronomicon. While waiting for the debut of the book, our heroes met Cleo, Deuce, Draculaura, Clawd and Ghoulia. Things began to deviate from the plan when Jill Sparrow showed up, along with her three adopted children; Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire. Shortly after the book was unveiled, Sora and the others sensed something was amiss, coming from three gatecrashers. But then Katina Jones showed up and things got even more chaotic.

Meanwhile, Kairi and her group arrived at the opening of The Crystal Palace. While waiting in line, Frankie introduced Kairi to more of her friends; Clair, Chad and Jackson, the later being half Monster. Kairi also met Lilith von Hellscream, whom used to hold a lot of prejudices against Monsters that was changed thanks to the friendship of Frankie and the others. But then an old flame, the violent and insane Lucas Vega, showed up and accosted Lilith for her friendship with the Monsters. Lilith rejected Lucas and he too his leave, threatening Kairi and the others with an ominous warning. But all thoughts of Lucas were driven from their minds as Kairi, Frankie and the others enjoyed the new night club. But their enjoyment was abruptly cut short. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 4: Dual Conflict

"What the bloody hell are you doing, Katina?" Jill demanded, "you're supposed to be back home in D.C."

But Katina ignored her, pushing past Jill as she glared hatefully at the human guests. "There they are!" she shouted.

"What are you talking about?" Julia asked

"Can't you see them?" Katina demanded.

"See who?" Jill asked.

Katina then pointed an accusing finger at the human guests, "Evil! Pure and simple from The Magical Dimension!"

Sora then realized that she was pointing at the three women that Steven was still talking to. By now everyone had heard Katina's shout, especially the three women. The platinum blond then shoved Steven aside and the three of them rushed for the central display case and the Necronomicon.

"No you don't!" shouted Katina as she raised her right arm and made a pushing gesture with her hand. Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm all felt a wave of psychic pressure pass through the room and the three women were knocked down. There was a triple flash of light and the three women shattered, while in their place was none other than Icy, Darcy and Stormy Trix, identical to the three dark witches that our heroes had fought twice already.

"Unbelievable!" exclaimed Sora, a shocked look on his face, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm looked equally shocked.

"Friends of yours?" Cleo asked.

"Not on your life!" said Riku.

Sora and the others then noticed that there were slight differences between the three witches before them and The Trix that they fought and defeated before. The Icy before them had slightly shorter hair than then one from last time and wore a green and black necklace. This Darcy had her hair tied in a single, long braid and wore a green and black bracelet on her left wrist, while this Stormy's hair was slightly longer and wore a green and black bracelet on her right wrist.

"Well, isn't this an ironic twist," said Icy as she, Darcy and Story picked themselves up off the floor, "we tried to handle things incognito, but instead, we've get to make things messy."

"And I worked so hard on our disguises," said Darcy.

"Look on the dark side," said Stormy, "this way will be more satisfying."

"I'm with you on that," said Darcy.

"I'm afraid you won't get any satisfaction this night," said Max as he cracked his knuckles, while Leona and the other Ramblers got into position, while also beginning to get the human guests out of the gallery.

"If you're here for The Necronomicon," said Patricia, "you're in for a world of hurt."

"They *are* here for The Necronomicon!" said Katina, "we can't let them touch the book!"

"I guarantee that it'll be in our hands in mere moments," said Icy as she and her sisters grinned viciously. But then the frosty witch looked at Katina with puzzled eyes, "but how did you know who we were?"

"That's my dirty little secret," said Katina, "but I'll admit this; I was warned that you were coming. Now go back to your universe or pay the consequences!"

"Don't try to reason with these evil bitches!" snapped Malcolm as he, Sora, Riku and Tess stood with Max and the others, "they're utterly ruthless and beyond redemption!"

"That's us in a nutshell," said Stormy.

"But how do you little twerps know about us?" Darcy asked.

"Are you kidding me?" Tess asked, "last time we saw you three, you were being dragged off to Omega."

"We were told that no one escapes from Omega," said Riku, "how'd you three do it?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Icy as she looked at Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm with an annoyed but curious eyes, "my sisters and I have never seen you before. And we've certainly never been to Omega."

"Nor do we want to," said Darcy, "that place gives me the willies."

"Well, how about a year ago?" Sora asked, "we fought at Alfea along side The Winx and The Specialists."

"You brats weren't at Alfea," said Stormy, "and you certainly weren't with that rotten Bloom, or Sky or any of the other losers!"

"Then how come you lost at Alfea?" Riku asked, "and I'll bet you lost in Relix and with Darkar."

"How the hell do you know about all of that?!" Darcy exclaimed.
"Who the hell are you people?"

"I think I know what's going on," said Malcolm, "but just to be safe, do you know who I am?"

"Are we supposed to?" Stormy asked.

"You do look kinda familiar," said Icy, "wait... yeah... I see it now. Are you related to Mirta?"

"She's my sister and you turned her into a pumpkin last year, you frigid, overdressed devil whore!" spat Malcolm.

"What... I... no, I'm not overdressed!" snapped Icy.

"As I thought," said Malcolm, "Sora, I think these Trix are from a parallel version of The Magical Dimension."

"Really?" Sora asked.

"Oh, I get it now," said Tess, "in the other version, Sora, Riku and Kairi never showed up, so things turned out differently for Bloom,

Sky, Carmen and the others."

"Carmen? Who's Carmen?" Stormy asked.

"So, there's no Carmen in the other Magix," said Sora, "wait, I'm starting to get confused."

"You're not the only one," said Jill. She then looked at Katina, "just what is going on here with you? I thought you were still recovering."

"I had a breakthrough," said Katina, "I promise I'll explain things later, but right now, we've got to stop them from taking The Necronomicon."

"There's nothing you can do to stop us," said Icy.

"Oh really?" Cleo asked as she, Duce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia, stood with Sora, Max and the others. The four with Shimmers deactivated the holographic devices, revealing themselves in all their Monster glory.

"Wow!" said an impressed Sora as he saw Duce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia in their true forms, "you guys are awesome!"

"Yes, we are impressive," said Cleo smugly.

"So, you *are* Monsters," said Icy irately, "it doesn't matter, you don't stand a chance against us!"

"I beg to differ," said Cleo, "And Malcolm is right, you are overdressed."

"I am not!" snapped Icy, "and you're one to talk. That getup you're in looks like it should be in a museum!"

"This museum at that," laughed Stormy.

"This gown is a revived retro style!" snapped Cleo, "it was chosen by the best designers in the world for me, just for this one night!"

"How much did that cost you?" Clawd asked.

"And just how much money do you have?" Draculaura asked curiously, "I just want to know."

"More than you can imagine," said Cleo smugly.

At that Ghoulia moaned something, while also using her I-Coffin to pull up an eight-digit sum.

"That much!?" exclaimed Draculaura, "you're richer than me! And I've been around long enough so that my trash can become antiques."

"I'm almost as rich," said Violet, "but thanks to the new terms of my family's estate, I can only access my trust fund when I need it, or with my step-mother's permission."

"I'm not buying you a car until you're 18!" snapped Jill, "I don't care how good a driver you are in practice or how quickly you can get a license. I'm not letting you out on the road until you mature a bit!"

"I was mature enough to keep my brother, sister and myself alive against Olaf!" snapped Violet.

"Violet, please don't fight," said Klaus as he held Sunny, "not now."

"Well, when else are we going to settle this?" Violet asked, "after Jill sticks me in a laboratory for the rest of my life?"

"Is this what you're so wound up about?" Jill asked, "where you'll be in The Bureau? Good God, Violet! I can't let them assign you to field duty, you wouldn't last a day!"

"How do you know that?" Violet asked.

"Well, first of all, you've never been properly trained," said Jill, "all field agents, both mortal and Meta Human, have to pass a barrage of

physical, mental and emotional tests to see how they can handle the rigors of fieldwork."

"I'm in good shape," said Violet, "I can run, jump and if you teach me, I can fight."

"There's more to battling the darkness than just running around and throwing a punch!" said Jill, "you have to be ready to make snap decisions that could mean life or death for you, your friends, everyone you love and event the entire world. You have to be ready to make sacrifices for the greater good."

"I've made more sacrifices for my brother, sister and myself than I'd care to count," said Violet, "Klaus and Sunny can back me up on that."

"I'd rather not," said Klaus, while Sunny burred something that could be translated as 'leave me outta this!'

"No one is doubting your courage or determination, Violet," said Max, "but I'm afraid I'm with your step-mother on this. You're just not ready for field work."

"She's not even ready to join The Bureau at this rate," said an annoyed Jill.

"We'll never know if I don't try," said Violet.

"You'll never be ready if you keep acting like a spoiled brat!" snapped Jill.

"Have you ever used a pistol?" Julia asked, "or a riffle? A shotgun? Any firearm?"

"I... no," said Violet in a subdued tone. "Mother and Father didn't like to keep guns in our old house." She then glared at Jill, "and I'm not a spoiled brat!"

"How about a knife?" Felicia asked as she flicked her wrist, producing a short throwing blade, "ever used one of these in anger? Ever stick a blade into a man's guts?" she then mimed stabbing someone.

"No," said Violet in an unsure, slightly nervous tone, "I could probably use a screwdriver like that if I had to."

"That's actually not a bad thing," said Felicia, "jab a screwdriver in a soft spot, like in the back of the head at the base of the skull. That's an instant kill spot. Gouging the eyes isn't a bad thing either when you get right down to it."

"Never mind that," said Jill, "Violet, haven't you even ever gotten into a fight? Do you know any means of self defense?"

"No... but I'm a fast learner," said Violet, "just teach me and I'll prove I can be a field agent."

"She must really want to work for you guys," said Clawd.

"Or maybe she's got an alterative motive," said Tess.

"Dude, you gotta admire her tenacity," said Duce.

"Don't call me 'dude' and I won't call you 'sugarplum,'" said Tess.

"Why on Earth would you call him sugarplum?" Cleo asked.

"I don't know," said Tess, "it was the first thing I could thing of."

"Excuse me," said an irate Icy, while Stormy and Darcy also looked thoroughly annoyed, "but my sisters and I have an appointment to keep."

"So, would you be so kind as to hand over The Necronomicon?" Darcy asked.

"Not that we wouldn't mind crushing you like the bugs you are," said Stormy, "but time is money."

"You're stealing the book for money?" Draculaura asked.

"Whatever you're being paid to take the book, I'll double it!" said Cleo in an overly dramatic manner, "I'll triple it, anything to keep The Necronomicon out of the wrong hands."

"It was a figure of speech, you ancient bimbo!" snapped Stormy.

"Don't call my girl a bimbo, you ugly witch!" snapped Duce.

"Don't call my sister ugly, you scaly freak!" snapped Darcy.

"Watch out!" said Sora, "she's got some serious mind magic. She can hypnotize you!"

"That one can summon up some pretty nasty weather," said Malcolm as he pointed at Stormy, then at Icy, "while she's just a frosty bitch!"

"How do you know so much about our powers!?" Icy demanded.

"We fought and defeated you in an alternate universe," said Riku.

"That's right!" said Sora, "we kicked your butts twice already! We can do it again!"

"Well, whatever you think about our other selves in that other universe," said Icy, "this version of myself and my sisters are on a whole other level."

"Care to back that up?" Clawd asked as he cracked his knuckles.

"Oh, go chase this," said Darcy as she summoned a tennis ball and tossed it over her shoulder.

"BALL!" Clawd shouted excitedly. He then ran after the tennis ball as if he were an overeager puppy.

"Oh my ghou!, " said a mortified Draculaura.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"You're right," said Duce, "thank goodness that Clawdeen isn't here."

"Take a hint from wolf boy," said Darcy as she glared at Cleo, Ghoulia, Duce and Draculaura, "stay out of our way," she then cast a spell that made the ball explode, leaving Clawd singed and heavily disoriented, "or pay the price!"

"Clawd!" exclaimed Draculaura as she rushed over to her beau.

"I'm okay," said Clawd in a dazed tone, "hey, D? How come there's three of you? Not that I don't mind, just more of you to love."

"How pathetic," said Icy, while Stormy giggled viciously.

"Hey! You can't do that!" snapped Duce as he lowered his glasses and shot his green petrifying beams from his eyes.

"Oh, please," said Darcy as she cast a deflecting spell that sent the petrifying beams back at Duce. He and Cleo ducked the beams, which shot over them and hit a painting of The Great Pyramids, turning it to stone.

"That was an original Yeatley!" snapped Laura, "there's only seven in the world, one for each of The Ancient Wonders, and you ruined it!" Red runes appeared on her skin as she powered up a psychic blast and set it at Darcy, but the witch sidestepped it as if it were nothing.

"My turn!" Stormy as she sent a hurricane-force blast of wind that knocked Laura off her feet, only to dodge a knife from Felicia.

"You want to play with sharp objects?" Icy asked, "try this!" she then sent a fury of razor-sharp icicles at Felicia. She dodged most of them, but two of the icicles cut her right shoulder, knocking her off balance and onto the ground.

"Enough of this nonsense!" snapped Cleo as she pulled out a small gold and obsidian statue of Osiris.

"Wait, not that!" said Clawd as Draculaura helped him up, "your magic items don't always work!"

"Oh, playing with unreliable magic, are we?" Icy asked daringly, "I'm so afraid, my knees are knocking!" with that she and her vile sisters laughed cruelly.

"We'll see how funny you think it is when you're spending the next thousand years vomiting locusts!" said Cleo irately, "prepare to be cursed!" she then pressed the head of the idol and a beam of dark green magic shot out from its eyes, hitting Icy in the stomach.

She flinched from the attack and heaved, but instead of a river of locusts from her mouth, there only came two flies that she burped out.

"What... no!" exclaimed Cleo in a shocked and confused tone, "that's not all! That can't be all! I was assured that the curse entailed vomiting locusts for a thousand years!"

"Sorry," said Icy, she then burped up another fly, "but your pathetic Earth magic isn't going to work on me or my sisters!" she then burped up another fly.

"Maybe you really are cursed," said Darcy, while Stormy giggled, "but it's a little one. And still kinda gross."

"It'll be worth it if we get the book!" said Icy. "Let's get this over with, sisters! We can counter the powers of these freaks and mutants! And they dare not use their more... explosive weapons in this place."

"Yeah," said Stormy, "they don't want to risk ruining their precious antiques and historical artifacts."

"You mean this crap?" Julia asked. From up her sleeves appeared a pair of .45 pistols. She then aimed one at a Ming Dynasty vase and pulled the trigger, the bullet shattering the vase into countless fragments.

"Are you insane?!" exclaimed Riku.

"I'm starting to wonder that myself," said Klaus, while Sunny burred in agreement.

"What?" Julia asked, then blew out the whiff of smoke from her pistol, "it was a fake."

"Everything in this room is a fake," said Patricia, "what, did you think we'd put priceless antiques at risk? No, every artifact in the room, excluding The Necronomicon, is a reproduction. The real stuff is in storage."

"I knew it!" said Draculaura, she then looked triumphantly at Cleo, "I told you that hieroglyphic wall was a reproduction!"

"Yes, but how did you know?" Cleo asked.

"When you've been around as long as I have," said Draculaura, "you tend to notice things."

"Too bad you won't notice much more!" shouted Icy as she shot more razor-sharp icicles at Draculaura and Clawd, the two of them barely avoiding being eviscerated.

"So what if the stuff in here is all fakes?" Darcy asked, "so what if the mutants can use their weapons? Big deal! Our powers can block anything they can use against us!"

Just then came an earsplitting gunshot and Darcy was knocked head over heels.

"You sure about that?" John asked as he stood at the gallery entrance, an enormous breach-loading double barrel rifle in his

hands.

"That's my Nitro Express raffle!" exclaimed an outraged Julia. "You dirty thief!"

"No, you said I could borrow it," said John as he pulled out the spent .700 cartridge and loaded a fresh one, "you just don't remember." He then closed the breach, pulled the hammer back and aimed it at Icy, "now, unless you want a nice big hole blasted into your torso, like your sister, I suggest that you and your other sister surrender!"

Just then Darcy got back up, her hands clutching her midsection and a very angry and pained expression on her face, but otherwise she was perfectly fine.

"You bastard!" spat Darcy as she nearly lost her balance, "that really hurt!"

"No way!" said an astonished Julia, "that gun uses bullets powerful enough to take down a dragon!"

"Get this straight, little mutant!" said Icy, "my sisters and I, we eat dragons for breakfast!"

"That must give you bitches horrible heartburn!" said Malcolm as he, Sora, Riku and Tess, summoned their Keyblades and stood in front of The Necronomicon, "assuming you overdressed harlots have hearts!"

"We do have hearts," said Stormy, "black as midnight, and what's with those freaky swords?"

"And we're not overdressed!" snapped Icy.

"Isn't it obvious?" Darcy asked, "these four twerps are Keyblade Wielders."

"Oh, Keyblades, yeah, now I remember," said Stormy, "history class."

"And here I thought you never paid attention in history class," said Darcy.

"If you know about Keyblade Wielders," said Riku, "then you know that we're not so easy to kill."

"As if we'd be concerned by a bunch of fancy toothpicks," said Icy.

"How about this?" Jill asked as she grabbed a katana from a Japanese display, "this may not be a true Hattori Hanzo blade, but it's still sharp enough to cut right through you!"

"Just as ours can render you into mulch!" shouted Riku.

"How pathetic," said Icy. She then summoned three golems made out of ice, each ten feet tall. "Crush the fools!"

"It's times like this that I really miss Heath!" said Draculaura as one of the ice golems advanced on her and the other Monsters, the second golem attacked the Meta Humans and the last one lumbered towards Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm and Jill.

Clawd got in front of the first ice golem and slashed at it with his claws, scoring lines deep into the frozen body but it quickly regenerated the lost ice. It then swung one of its fists at Clawd, intending to crush him into pulp. Clawd barely rolled out of the way in time, slashing at the creature's ankles, but the damage was regenerated again.

"Now I'm missing Heath!" said Clawd as he dodged another fist swing.

"You think you've got problems?" Steven asked as he dodged a fist swing, "I knew we should have brought flame throwers!"

Ken then ran at the second ice golem and jumped up, his left hand glowing with a bright orange light. He then delivered a chop to the

middle of the creature's head. It cracked right down the middle and split in half.

"Dynamic Chop!" shouted Ken.

But then the two halves of the ice golem regenerated, becoming two, whom were soon on their feet and rampaging in the gallery.

"Oh, thanks a lot, Kenny!" snapped Felicia as she got out of the way of the two golems, "as if we didn't have problems enough!"

"Don't call me that!" snapped Ken.

"Whatever, Kenny!" said Felicia. She then pulled out dozens of knives and threw them at one of the ice golems, while Julia was shooting at the other.

Sora and Malcolm were blasting the fourth ice golem with Fire spells, while Riku was shooting his Dark Aura, but the creature shrugged it off like it was nothing.

"They've been enchanted to repel heat!" said Malcolm.

"Is it that obvious?" Tess asked. She then went invisible, reappearing behind the ice golem and climbed onto its back. She then swung her Keyblade and cut its head off. But it regenerated the head and then shook Tess off its back. She landed on her feet, then rolled out of the way of a fist swipe.

But then the severed ice golem head began to regenerate. Within seconds there were five frozen creatures terrorizing our heroes and allies.

The Trix found this highly humorous as they laughed viciously at the plight of our heroes and allies.

"I knew we should have done something like this against Bloom and those pathetic Winx of hers!" said Stormy.

"We'll get our revenge on them all," said Icy, "once we have the book."

"Why rush things?" Darcy asked, "this is starting to get good."

Just then there came another earsplitting gunshot and one of the ice golems completely shattered. John then aimed his big game riffle at another ice golem and fired, shattering that one too.

"You have to destroy them in one go!" shouted John as he unloaded the spent cartridges and loaded fresh ones.

Max then grabbed one of the three remaining ice golems and lifted it over his head, then began twisting it, causing the creature to crack and eventually shatter into countless pieces.

Ghoulia then pulled out her phone and used it to scan one of the remaining ice golems. She did a quick calculation in her head, then pulled out a laser pointer from her pocket and used it to indicate a spot on the creature's midsection. She then moaned loud enough to get Clawd's attention.

"Got it!" shouted Clawd. He then ran up to the ice golem, jumped up and delivered a double claw strike, followed by a summersault kick, right in the spot indicated by the laser pointer. The creature cracked and shattered into pieces.

But the right hand of the ice golem remained intact and began regenerating.

"No way, dude!" shouted Duce as he took his sunglasses off and shot his petrifying beam at the regenerating ice hand, turning it to stone and halting the regeneration process. Draculaura then walked up and stomped it into gravel.

"I may not have all of my vampire powers," said Draculaura, "but I'm pretty strong when I want to be."

The last ice golem had been taken care of by Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm and Jill, with the later jamming her katana into the chest of the creature and forming several cracks. Tess and Riku followed up by throwing their Keyblades at the thing, further cracking it. Sora and Malcolm finished it off by shooting Thunder spells at it, hitting the katana and blowing the creature up into powder.

"Oh, that's just great," said Icy irately, "you just can't create competent elemental minions anymore."

"Or maybe it's just your shoddy spell work!" snapped Malcolm.

"We really don't have time for this," said Darcy.

"What's the rush?" Laura asked, "we've got all night."

"Mother Goose to Big Brother!" said Patricia, "Lockdown!"

Sora and the others knew that within seconds the gallery and the museum would be sealed off from the outside, leaving them trapped inside with The Trix. But our heroes and allies were glad that the human guests had been evacuated in time.

But nothing happened. The doorway of the gallery remained open, while none of the concealed security devices appeared. Not even the panic room sealed.

"Mother Goose to Big Brother!" said a concerned Patricia as she tapped her earpiece, "Lockdown! Lockdown!"

"Patricia, we've been sabotaged!" shouted Tyler, "the lockdown protocols have been infected with a computer virus! The museum is wide open!"

"You did this!" snapped Patricia at The Trix.

"That's right!" said Icy triumphantly, "we've been one step ahead of you the whole time."

"We knew you mutants and some freaks would be here," said Darcy, "and that you had that fancy security system set up."

"And we enhanced our own magical defenses," said Stormy, "none of your powers or abilities can touch us!"

At that Icy and Darcy glared irately at Stormy, "thanks for giving away our big secret!" snapped Darcy.

"So, you're using enhancement magic," said Cleo. She then began rummaging through her purse, "I think I've just the amulet to counter that."

"Forget their enhancements," said Max, "they knew all about us and our plans!"

"Either their clairvoyance is beyond comparison," said Laura, "or there's a traitor in The Bureau!"

"You'll never guess how we got our info on you losers!" snapped Icy, "but we've wasted enough time already. Darcy!"

"I was hoping I'd get to use this spell," said Darcy as she pulled out a dark purple crystal and hovered it above her hand, "let's see you survive this!"

The crystal began emitting waves of dark purple magic that sapped the strength of our heroes and allies. Within seconds they were all on the floor, weak as kittens. Not even Max Kildare was immune to the vile dark magic.

But a handful were still standing, Katina being one of them.

"You're gonna pay for hurting my friends!" snapped Katina. She then sent a massive mind blast at Darcy, knocking the vicious witch off her feet and forcing her to drop the crystal, shattering it on the floor.

Sora and the others gasped in relief as the dark magic sapping their strength ended. But they were still very weak and it would be a while

before they could fight again.

Darcy then got back up and clutched at her midsection, "I'm still sore from getting shot!" she snapped. She then sent a mind blast of her own at Katina. She endured it and the two of them were then locked in a psychic battle, both of them straining to overcome the other's mental defenses.

"While Darcy keeps the mutant occupied," said Icy, "let's go get the book."

"With pleasure," said Stormy. But before they took two steps toward The Necronomicon, Aaron jumped in and administer a jet injection into Icy's left arm. Almost instantly, Icy's left side went numb.

"I may have taken an oath to preserve life," said Aaron as he loaded a fresh dose of anesthetic into the jet injector, "but I can still slow you down!"

Stormy retaliated by blasting Aaron with a small tornado, hurtling him across the room. He crashed to the floor, landing on a display of Ancient Rome.

"I never liked doctors," said Stormy. She then looked at her sister, "you okay?"

"Do I look okay?!" an irate Icy asked in a slurred tone, her left arm hanging limply from her side as she shuffled on her right foot towards The Necronomicon.

But then John ran up and stood in front of Icy, holding his double-barreled riffle in front of her face, "your protective spells are impressive," he said as he pulled both hammers back, "but I doubt you'll survive at this range!"

"Screw you!" snapped Icy as she grabbed the riffle barrels with her right hand, freezing the gun to John's hands. She then summoned a dagger made of ice and stabbed him in the heart. John gave a

startled grunt, looking down at his impaled heart and he fell over, bleeding to death within seconds.

"No!" shouted Rebecca. She then picked up another replica Ming Dynasty vase and brought it down on Stormy's head.

Stormy shouted in pain as she felt her head. She then brought her hand up and saw some blood. She then glared at Rebecca, "you filthy mutant bitch!"

Rebecca responded by grabbing Stormy by the throat and began strangling the witch. But Stormy blasted Rebecca right in the midsection with a bolt of dark lightning. Rebecca was thrown across the room, hitting the far wall and sliding to the floor, her front severely burned.

"I'm seriously getting pissed," said Stormy as she felt her head again, seeing that she was still bleeding a bit, while her free hand felt her throat.

"You're not the only one," said Darcy in a dazed tone. Katina had been rendered unconscious, her nose bleeding, while Darcy also had a bloody nose and bloodshot eyes, a vein on her forehead pulsed with obvious pain. "I have the mother of all headaches."

"Our benefactor should have given us stronger defensive spells," said Stormy.

"They were strong enough to get us this far," said Icy. She then limped up to the glass case and froze the lock. It shattered and she threw the case off.

"At last, The Necronomicon!" said Stormy triumphantly.

But then Violet ran in and grabbed the book before Icy could touch it.

"I may only be new to the realms of the supernatural," said Violet as she protectively clutched The Necronomicon to her chest, "but I'll

never let you have this!"

"You shouldn't have done that, little girl," said a highly irate Darcy as she placed her right hand on her forehead and wiped the blood away from her nose with the back of her left hand.

Icy shook her left hand, flexing her fingers as the anesthetic wore off, "don't test me," she said, glairing venomously at Violet, "give me that book, or else!" With that the three witches advanced on Violet, forcing her to back into one of the gallery corners.

Violet looked around and saw that anyone who could have come to her rescue was either incapacitated or dead, while her brother and sister were the other side of the room. Klaus put Sunny down in a safe place and made ready to run over, but Violet shot her brother a look that told him to stay put. He got the message and picked Sunny back up again.

"I may not have any special powers like Jill and the others," said Violet, "but I'm not one to give in to fear! I've seen the worst evils this world has to offer. You witches don't scare me! You want the book! Come and get it!"

"Oh, such a stirring speech," said Darcy in a mock sympathetic tone, "so brave, so bold," she then frowned, "I hate that." She then cast a persuasion spell, "now, hand over The Necronomicon!"

"No!" shouted Violet defiantly as she clutched the book tighter.

At that Darcy blinked in confusion. She shook her head, as if clearing it, then cast the persuasion spell again, "I said give me the book!"

"And I said no!" Violet shouted again, "you want it, you'll have to take it from me!"

"Give me the damn book, you brat!" shouted Darcy as she rushed at Violet and grabbed her arm. But then Darcy cried out in pain as she

released Violet and clutched her hand, her palm severely burned and blistered.

"What the... !?" exclaimed Stormy. She walked over and tried to wrestle the book out of Violet's arms, but Stormy cried out in pain and flinched away, both her palms severely burned and blistered.

"What did you do, you mutant!?" exclaimed Icy.

"I... I don't know," said Violet in an astonished tone, "I didn't know I could do this."

"You... might not be doing it," said Darcy in a contemplative tone, "sisters, I believe we have a puzzling situation. We cannot touch either the girl or the book."

"Then how the hell are we going to get it?" Stormy asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Icy asked as she smiled viciously, "we take them both with us?"

"What?" Stormy asked.

"Oh, of course!" said Darcy as she too smiled viciously, "and I know just the spell," she then shot a beam of dark purple magic at Violet. In a flash, Violet was trapped in a spherical cage of dark purple energy that hovered in midair.

"So long as none of our powers actually touch her or the book," said Darcy, "we can do whatever we want with her."

"But we still need to get the book away from her," said Stormy.

"We'll worry about that later," said Icy, "but for now, having the girl and the book would be a double benefit."

"You'll never get away with this," said Violet as Darcy made the energy cage hover over to the three witches, "whatever you're going to do, it won't work. Jill and the others, they'll stop you!"

"If they couldn't stop us tonight," said Icy, "what makes you think they'll ever beat us?"

"Because you made us mad," said Max as he and the others started to get back up, "and when you make The Ramblers mad, you sign your own death warrant."

"We're the best at fighting evil," said Laura as she helped Katina back up.

"You may have the edge now," said Felicia as she and Julia got back up, followed by Ken and Steven, "but we'll figure out your weakness."

"We didn't even get to fight!" said Leon as he and Jessie got up. Leon had a few minor scratches, while Jessie had two diagonal cuts down her face that were bleeding, cuts that were identical to the scars the other Jessie had. Jessie and Leon were followed by Patricia and Aaron, "so we'll be extra motivated to kick your skanky asses!"

"And we're motivated too!" said Sora as he, Riku, Tess and Malcolm got back up.

"So are we!" said Cleo as she, Duce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia got up, "as Ra as my witness, I won't rest until I see you cursed for ten thousand years!"

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"You're right," said Draculaura. She then glared at The Trix, "and you are overdressed."

"Stop saying that!" snapped Icy.

"Then get a new wardrobe, bitch!" snapped Tess.

"Don't bother," said Jill as she glared hatefully at Icy, "you won't live long enough to try out any new clothes." She looked at Violet, "just

hold on, sweetheart, you won't be in their vile hands for long, I swear it."

"I believe you, Jill!" said Violet, her eyes brimming with tears, "I... I love you... mom!"

"I love you too, darling," said Jill, her eyes full of tears as well.

"Can you losers get any more pathetic?" Darcy asked, "we won, you lost! Get with the program!"

"Twenty-four hours," said Jill in a hateful tone.

"What's that you're saying?" Icy asked.

"Twenty-four hours," Jill said again, "that's how long you've got left to live," she sighed, "it's times like this that I truly and dearly miss Andrew."

"It's 8:42 P.M.," said Patricia as she looked at her watch.

"Thank you," said Jill. She then glared at The Trix, "8:42 P.M. tomorrow night. Before that, I will see the three of you dead! I swear it!"

"You'd better believe it," said Felicia to The Trix, "for when Jill Sparrow makes a promise, she keeps it."

"By this time tomorrow, we'll be queens of the universe!" said Icy, "bye, now!" with that she activated a teleportation spell.

"Klaus! Sunny!" Violet shouted, just as she teleported out with the three witches.

"Violet!" shouted Klaus, while Sunny also shouted incoherently.

"Well, this sucks," said Deuce.

"That's it in a nutshell," said Steven.

Just then Tyler ran into the room, "oh my God!" he exclaimed. He ran over to Aaron, "big brother!"

"I'm fine, Ty," said Aaron, "a little pissed, but fine. The same could be said for most of us," he then looked at Jessie, whom was holding a cloth napkin to her bleeding face, "how'd that happen?"

"I got careless," said Jessie as she took the napkin away from her face. The bleeding from her cuts were slowing down, "how do I look?"

"Frightful," said Cleo, "but in a good way."

"Thanks, I guess," said Jessie as she placed a clean napkin to her face.

"Aaron!" Ken shouted as he knelt over Rebecca, "she's still alive!"

Aaron retrieved his medical bag and ran over to Rebecca, with Sora, Cleo, Patricia and the others shortly behind them.

"Is she...?" Julia asked.

"She has massive internal injuries and burns," said Aaron as he used a scanning device on Rebecca, "it's a miracle she still has a pulse, let alone still breathing."

Just then Rebecca opened her eyes and gasped for breath.

"I think she's trying to say something," said Aaron. He then bent down to hear better, "Rebecca, what is it? What are you trying to tell us?"

Rebecca then gasped, "Kat... Katina... scan... scan..."

"She wants Katina to scan her mind," said Patricia.

"Get out of the way!" Katina shouted. Sora and the others backed away several paces, giving Katina plenty of breathing room.

Katina then placed both hands on either side of Rebecca's head. The ebony Scanner then used her powers to read the thoughts of the dieing woman. After a few seconds, Katina sat back and smiled down at Rebecca, "it's okay," she said, "I got it."

Rebecca smiled up in thanks, then looked at John's fallen form, "Otheon," she whispered, "Otheon... my love... wait... wait for me in the Summerlands..." she then let out a final breath and died.

"It's over," said Aaron. He then grabbed a tablecloth and covered Rebecca, then did the same for John.

"No, it's just beginning," said Katina, "when Rebecca grabbed Stormy, she was able see into the past, concerning the three witches. This conspiracy is greater than I thought."

With that Jill walked right up to Katina and slapped her across the face.

"Jill!" exclaimed Max.

"What the hell!?" exclaimed Leon.

"How dare you!" Jill shouted at Katina, "how dare you show up and get Violet involved in this!"

"Not that I agree with Jill slapping you, Katina," said Patricia, "but I sympathize with her feelings. You do have some explaining to do."

"Just what the hell is going on, Katina?" Max asked.

"It's a long story," said Katina.

"Well, you'd better get started," said Julia, "because Jill's got less than twenty-four hours to keep her promise."

"You can run, you cowards," said Jill, speaking to The Trix, "you can run to the ends of the universe, but you'll never run far enough."

... The Crystal Palace... New Salem...

"Oh man," said Clair as she glared irately at Holt, "this stinks worse than a raw egg in an old shoe in a chicken coop."

"At least he's not making a mess of things," said Frankie as she, Clawdeen, Kairi and Lilith began moving to the new beat.

"He's ruined my date," said Clair, "you know, I'll bet that Holt sabotaged those earpieces so he could come out. He and Jackson aren't on the best terms, you know."

"Well, at least he's making things more enjoyable for everyone else," said Kairi.

"Yeah, everyone's having a great time," said Frankie.

Just then there came a scream from the building entrance. The dancers stopped and saw first one, then another Monster being tossed to the floor like potato sacks, both of them looking heavily beaten and bloodied.

Then at least twenty human teenagers, fifteen boys and five girls, all of them between sixteen and nineteen, all of them wearing black leather jackets and spiked gloves, walked in with looks of vicious glee on their faces. And right in front of the black-jacketed humans was Lucas, a look of vile vindication on his face.

"Lucas!" exclaimed an outraged Lilith, "what the hell are you doing?!"

"I warned you, Lilith," said Lucas, "I warned you that the revolution was coming. But I didn't tell you that it was starting tonight, right here, right now."

"I stand corrected," said Clair, "this sucks worse than a raw egg in an old shoe in a chicken coop, and a brown egg at that."

"That's a bold statement," said Clawdeen.

"You!" Abbey shouted as she stomped towards Lucas, "angry, Monster Hating bully boy! How dare you ruin this evening of dance and making the merriment!"

"I dare because I can," said Lucas, "you frigid freak."

"Don't you call my girl a freak!" shouted Heath as he summoned a fireball and threw it at Lucas, whom swatted it aside like it was nothing.

"What was that, a firecracker?" Lucas asked in a mocking tone. At that the nineteen other boys and girls with him laughed cruelly.

"Just what the hell are you doing here, Lucas?" Lilith demanded.

"I told you that we're starting the revolution," said Lucas, "honestly, Lilith, associating with these freaks is either making you deaf or hindering your intelligence."

"My mind and ears are perfectly clear," said Lilith irately, "and you lied to me! You are using! There's no other way you could have blocked that fireball without being hurt! You're using Soma-15"

"Oh, but I didn't lie," said Lucas, "I'm not using Soma-15, not the original that is."

At that one of the back-jacketed teens laughed, a girl with long, straight black hair, brown eyes and a maniacal look on her face.

"Eliza Herringdale," said Lilith, "you got dragged into this too."

"Nice to see you too, Elly, dear," said the girl, Eliza Herringdale, "and I wasn't dragged in. I volunteered."

"As did I," said a boy with short brown hair, green eyes and carried a lighter.

"And me," said a girl with shoulder length brown hair, blue eyes and used a stiletto knife to clean underneath her red-painted nails.

"And me," said a tall boy with a shaved head, black eyes and hands that could crush rocks easily.

Lilith looked at the two boys and girl in turn, "Orlando Trent, Paulette Stonebrook and Dalton Northwood," she then crossed her arms, "not exactly how I pictured a reunion."

"You know these jerks?" Gill asked as he, Lagoona and Chad hurried over.

"They used to be my friends," said Lilith, "before they decided to follow the path of insanity."

"Genius and insanity are often confused," said Orlando Trent.

"We were once part of your uncle's elite class, Lilith," said Paulette Stonebrook, "we can be together again."

"Join us, Lilith von Hellscream," said Dalton Northwood, "join us in the revolution."

"I'm willing to ignore our earlier disagreement," said Lucas. He then held out his hand, "come with us and embrace the future."

"Screw you, you drug addled maniac!" snapped Lilith. She then spat into Lucas' hand.

"Oh, you're in for it now!" giggled Eliza, "I knew you couldn't be trusted, Elly."

"Don't call me that!" snapped Lilith.

"You used to love that nickname," said Lucas as he wiped his hand on a handkerchief. He then pulled out a syringe full of dark green liquid and held it out to Lilith, "the old drug was too unstable. But this new formula, Soma-99, is not only more powerful, it will open your mind to the truth!"

"Your twisted truth, you mean," said Lilith, "and when did..."

"Our science friend perfected it," said Lucas, "just take it, Lilith, take Soma-99 and be transformed!"

"We've all taken it, Elly," said Eliza, "and look at me," she spun in a circle, "not only am I stronger than ever, but also beautiful!"

"You didn't care about looks before," said Lilith, "now you're a narcissistic lunatic!" she looked at all the black-jacketed teens, "you're all nuts!"

"No, we are the future," said Lucas as he pocketed the syringe, "we're the children of the revolution, and we're starting by tearing down this abomination of a nightclub! From this night forward, any human associating with Monsters, and vice versa, shall be punished! Any human who wishes to avoid a horrific torture and possible death, leave now and embrace the future!"

There was a sudden confusion as nearly all the humans in the nightclub ran for the door. Within minutes, only Chad, Clair, Lilith and Kairi were the only humans left.

"There goes a bunch of kids who would never make it into Gryffindor," said Kairi.

"I have no idea what you're talking about, love," said Lagoona, "but one thing's for sure, we're not going to let these hate-mongering wankers push us around!" At that Gill, Clawdeen, Frankie, Abbey, Heath and all the other Monsters shouted in agreement.

"I was hoping you'd say that," said Lucas.

"I was hoping you'd say that too," said Lilith as she cracked her knuckles. "Chad, Clair, Kairi, you should take cover."

"I'm not leaving without Jackson," said Clair as she looked up at the D.J. station, where Holt was still remixing the music, apparently oblivious to the sudden twist of events.

"Good luck separating him from his music," said Heath.

"Allow me," said Paulette. She then threw her knife at the music turntables, hitting in just the right spot to short the sound system out.

"Hey! What gives!?" Holt exclaimed, "my music, where'd it go?" he then looked around, "wait, what's going on?" he then twitched, "oh, no! It's too quiet! I'm fading out!" with a flash of flames, he reverted to Jackson.

"What... what's going on?" He asked in a confused tone, "oh, man, I really need to work out the bugs in my earpieces," he then saw Lucas and his cabal, "now what?"

Clair then grabbed him by the arm and pulled him away from the turntables, "no time to explain!" she said, "we gotta take cover!"

"Normally I'm against fighting," said Chad, "but I'll be rooting for you, Frankie!" he then joined Clair and Jackson as they ran over to a snake table and flipped it over, forming a makeshift barrier and took cover behind it, "kick their cans!"

"Will do," said Frankie as she gave Chad the thumbs up. She then glared at Lucas, "I also don't like violence. But if you really want trouble, you're gonna get it!" With that her neck bolts sparked with her outrage.

"Ditto!" shouted Kairi as she summoned her Keyblade.

"What the hell is that!?" exclaimed one of the black-jackets.

"I have no idea," said Lucas, "but she has sided with the freaks, and therefore must be punished."

"Punish this!" shouted Abbey as she shot a double hand beam of freezing energy at the Monster haters. Two of them dodged the left beam, which cause a patch of floor to turn into ice, while a third

Monster Hater got caught on the right arm, freezing it solid. But he flexed his arm and broke it free of the ice.

"Is not possible!" said a shocked Abbey, "no Normie can break out of Yeti ice beam."

"Face it, freaky bitch!" laughed Eliza, "your days are numbered!"

"We'll see about that!" shouted a huge minotaur, wearing a red shirt with a maze-like pattern. He then bellowed wrathfully and charged straight at the black-jackets.

"Manny, no!" shouted Frankie, but she was too late to stop him.

Dalton then got in front of Manny and grabbed the minotaur by the horns and lifted him clear overhead, then threw him across the room. Manny bellowed in surprise as he crashed to the floor and didn't get up again.

"Unbelievable!" exclaimed a horrified Lagoona.

"Typical minotaur bull crap," said Dalton as he nonchalantly brushed some lint off of his jacket, "always rushing in without thinking things through."

"Think this!" shouted Frankie as she shot a bolt of lightning that arched from her neck bolts, up her arm and out her hand towards Dalton. Orlando got in front and blocked the bolt with his hand, which was only slightly singed from the massive surge of electricity.

"No way!" said a startled Frankie.

"Face it, you stitched bitch!" snapped Lucas, "you and your freaks are outclassed!" He then jumped out of the way as Lilith rushed, narrowly avoiding a fist to his face.

"You want to talk about class?" Lilith asked as she assumed a fighting stance, "try me for size!"

"I thought you'd never ask," said a viciously grinning Lucas as he too assumed a fighting stance, "we do have a score to settle!"

"Are you still pissed that I beat you in our last sparring match?" Lilith asked, "well, too bad! I won fair and square, and I'll win now!" with that she launched an attack, while Lucas rushed in as well, the two of them exchanging punches, kicks and other attacks that were meant to be killing blows, with each of them either blocking or dodging them.

"While they're occupied," said Eliza, "why not the rest of us have fun," she then addressed the other Monster Haters, "tear the freaks apart!"

With that the Monster Haters rushed forward towards the Monsters, whom fought back with all their powers and abilities. Yet the black-clad humans were either too fast, too strong or too durable, easily countering the powers of the Monsters and inflicting a lot of pain on the various werewolves, vampires and other creatures.

Only a handful were able to hold their own; Frankie, who was able to generate more power in her lightning attacks and fend off the drug-addicted teens; Clawdeen, who was just a hair faster than the enemy and was able to deliver some solid strikes with her claws; Gill and Lagoona, whose natural grace and agility allowed them to avoid most of the enemy attacks and deliver powerful kicks that knocked the Monster Haters back; Heath and Abbey, who alternated between fire and ice attacks that forced the enemy away.

Kairi of course was doing the best, her Keyblade strikes managed to break the arms of at least two Monster Haters, while giving a third a concussion.

But to the shock of Kairi and the Monsters, all the wounds inflicted on the Monster haters regenerated, healing within seconds after inflicted, while the drug-addled maniacs seemed to possess a limitless supply of stamina.

"I think we're losing!" shouted Gill as he dodged a kick from one of the Monster Haters, only to be tackled by another.

"Get off him!" shouted Lagoona as she grabbed the head of the Monster Hater, digging her fingers into his eyes. The black-jacketed teen cried out in pain and released Gill, only to deliver an elbow strike to Lagoona's face. She fell down as the Monster Hater's eyes regenerated, only for Kairi to bash him in the head.

"Either these guys are fortified with magic," said Kairi as she helped Lagoona up, then kicked the Monster Hater in the chest, "or they're Splicers!"

"What's that?" Frankie asked as she electrocuted a girl monster-hater.

"It's a human who tampered with his or her DNA," said Kairi as she bashed another Monster Hater in the head, "in order to gain special abilities."

"Normies with super powers," said Clawdeen as she gouged the face of one of the drug-addicted maniacs, "I'd never thought I'd see it." She then realized that Toralei was right behind her, also fighting a Monster Hater. The two of them then got back to back in their respective fights, "and here's another thing I thought I'd never see! The two of us, working together!"

"Don't get me wrong, Clawdeen!" said Toralei as she slashed the face of her opponent, then followed up with a kick to the groin, "I'm only fighting for my own survival. These Normie bastards mean business, and so do I!"

"There's still the old adage," said Kairi as she bashed another enemy head in, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Toralei threw her opponent across the room and glared at Kairi, "let's just get this straight, outworlder! I don't like you and I'll never like you! I don't particularly like Normies for that matter, and I definitely

don't like Frankie, Clawdeen and the rest of their crew. I'm only fighting with you all because I'm in as much danger as everyone else here."

"I can accept mutual benefit," said Kairi.

"And I thought we were warming up that cold heart of yours, Toralei," Clawdeen teased after punching a Monster Hater in the face.

"My heart is warm enough, thank you very much," said Toralei, "and between you and me, Clawdeen, I wouldn't lift a whisker to save your flea-bitten hide, even if Frankie was paying me to be civil."

"Say what!?" exclaimed Clawdeen. But then she was tackled by two Monster Haters. One of them held her down while the other grabbed her head in an attempt to break her neck.

"See? Not my problem," said Toralei as she nonchalantly looked at her nails, only to be tackled by another Monster Hater.

"Clawdeen!" shouted Frankie as she tried to reach her friend, but another Monster Hater was in her way, while Kairi and the others were similarly occupied.

Just when Clawdeen was about to have her neck broken, Howleen jumped onto the back of the one holding Clawdeen down and bit his neck, forcing him off of Clawdeen, whom then slashed her attacker on the face, forcing that one back.

Just then came a loud whistle from somewhere in the club.

Lucas, whom was still fighting Lilith, jumped back and shouted, "ENOUGH! LET'S GO!"

At that all the Monster Haters stopped fighting and ran out of the club.

"Lucas, you bastard!" shouted Lilith, her dress torn in several places and she suffered a few minor cuts and bruises, but otherwise looked

ready to keep fighting, while Lucas hardly looked out of breath. "You sick bastard! Get back here and finish this!"

"In due time, dear Lilith!" said Lucas, "my followers and I have what we came for. Until later!"

"Bye, Elly!" said Eliza, whom then blew Lilith a kiss. With that she and Lucas ran out of the club, being the last of the Monster Haters to depart.

Kairi stopped to catch her breath as she surveyed the aftermath of the battle. The whole club had been completely trashed, all the decorations were ruined while broken furniture, smashed light and sound equipment, littered the floor, while a few exposed wires sparked.

Kairi then saw that nearly all the Monsters in the club had been injured in one way or another, while a few others were bleeding profusely or had multiple broken bones.

Frankie, Clawdeen, Howleen, Lagoona, Gill, Heath and Abbey were among the least wounded, only suffering from a few cuts, scrapes and bruises.

"That... that was awful," said Frankie as she found an intact chair to sit down in, "Kairi, do you do this kind of thing all the time?"

"Not all the time," said Kairi as she stood next to Frankie, "most of the time, my friends and I won. This," she indicated the carnage around her, "this isn't what I call a victory."

"We're all still alive," said Lagoona as she tore up a tablecloth for a bandage and used it on a cut on Gill's arm, "that's got to mean something."

"And no one's gonna die," said Kairi determinedly, "not while I'm here!" she then went among the wounded Monsters and began healing them with her power.

"Voltagious!" said an astonished Frankie as she and the others saw Kairi at work.

"She really is gifted," said an impressed Lagoon.

"Yeah, well, I'm gonna call 911 just to be safe," said Heath as he pulled out his cell phone.

"Why did Monster hating bullies leave like that?" Abbey asked, "they had edge, so why they run away like frightened baby yaks?"

"I don't know," said Lilith as she helped Kairi with the wounded, holding some of the Monsters still while Kairi healed them, "Lucas, he's mad, utterly and irrevocably mad, and the others are just as crazy, especially Eliza, she was always nuts. So, who knows what they're planning?"

"We've got bigger problems than that," said Clawdeen, "Howleen!"

"I'm fine, sis," said Howleen as she helped Romulus up, whom had a broken ankle "and your welcome for saving your neck."

"Forget my neck!" said an irate Clawdeen, "you bit one of those Normies!"

"You did what!?" Romulus exclaimed, while the other conscious werewolves looked shocked.

"Well, yeah, I did," said Howleen as she felt her lip, seeing that there was some blood there.

"Oh, my ghoul, you drew blood!" said a horrified Clawdeen.

"Well, that's what happens when you bite someone," said Howleen, "look, those bastards were gonna kill you, Clawdeen! I had to do something!"

"You could have done anything but bite him," said Romulus, "Howleen, werewolves don't bite humans for a reason."

"I thought you did," said Kairi, "that the full moon made you crazy and go on a killing spree."

"Only if the wolf is already insane or is sick," said Lagoona, "Kairi, we Monsters try our best not to harm Normies for a reason."

"They're afraid of us not just because we're different and scary," said Clawdeen, "it's because when a Monster tastes Normie blood, it drives us crazy."

"We become these horrible, murdering psychopaths," said Lagoona, "really monstrous creatures that are all but unstoppable."

"And that's when the authorities come in," said Toralei as she brushed a stray lock of hair out of her eyes, "and by that, I mean The Bureau."

"No, that can't be right," said Frankie, "I mean, sure, there's a lot of Monsters out there who aren't nice and who use their powers for evil; Valentine for one, and of course there's Nefera, but..."

"Frankie... not all Monsters turn out right," said Lagoona, "some are born or created evil, while others go bad for one reason or another."

"So, what's going to happen to me?" Howleen asked nervously.

"It all depends on how soon you start to cross over," said Romulus, "just how much of that Normie's blood did you swallow?"

"None," said Howleen, "at least I don't think I swallowed any of it. Anyway, I let go of him as soon as he was away from Clawdeen, and I couldn't have been rid of him sooner, he tasted something awful."

"Yeah, they did have a bad smell about them," said Romulus, "not an odor, but just a scent of... wrongness."

Kairi then realized that she did sense a feeling of wrongness from Lucas and his cabal, but hadn't noticed it in all the confusion of the battle.

"It's the drug, it has to be," said Lilith, "not only did they improve it, making them more powerful and insane, it's warping their very beings, their..."

"Their hearts?" Kairi suggested.

"Exactly," said Lilith, "Soma-99, it's turning them... dark."

"What do we do now?" Gill asked.

"We stop them, of course," said Lilith in a determined voice, "we get out of these ruined clothes, into more appropriate attire and go after Lucas and his gang."

"I don't think that's a good idea," said Frankie, "I mean, nearly everyone here got seriously hurt, while the rest of us were barely able to hold our own. I'm not saying we should just go home and pretend it never happened, but shouldn't we think this through?"

"Doing nothing won't help us," said Kairi, "but neither will rushing after those jerks blindly. We need to think of a plan."

"We need to call the authorities," said Heath.

"Yeah, The Bureau, they're the best to handle this kind of situation," said Gill.

"And have them cart off my sister to be either brainwashed or killed? I don't think so!" snapped Clawdeen.

"They're gonna kill me?" a horrified Howleen asked, "but I didn't swallow any blood!"

"They'll either kill you or scramble your brain so you won't hurt anyone," said Toralei as she helped Pursephoney and Meowlody get back up, the twin werecats both suffering from identical minor head wounds.

"No one is scrambling my sister's brain!" snapped Clawdeen. She then gave Howleen a comforting hug, "I won't let them hurt you, I promise." At that Howleen hugged her sister back.

"But we really should call in some help," said Lagoona, "those haters were right about one thing; we're outclassed."

"We're only outclassed if we let ourselves think that way," said Kairi, "I've faced more evils in the past few years than you can imagine. This is just another evil to be defeated, so that good can live in peace."

"Darn right!" said Frankie, "we can beat these Monster-Haters! But... it would be an idea to call Cleo and the others, to let them know what happened."

"Good idea, love," said Lagoona as she got out her cell phone.

"And maybe bringing in The Bureau might not be a bad idea either," said Heath, "we'll just not tell them about Howleen."

"If they don't know Howleen bite evil Normie, they won't scramble brain," said Abbey.

"Alright, we'll call the authorities," said Clawdeen. She then looked at Howleen, "and I'll make sure they don't lay a finger on you."

"I love you, big sis," said Howleen.

"Love you too, little sis," said Clawdeen. With that they hugged each other again.

Just then Lilith looked like she had just remembered something important, "my God! Chad, Clair, Jackson!"

She, Frankie, Clawdeen and Lagoona rushed over to where their friends had taken cover, only to find that Chad and Jackson had been knocked unconscious, while Clair was nowhere to be found.

"We were so distracted by the fight," said Lagoona, while Kairi healed Chad and Jackson, "we completely forgot about them."

Just then Jackson began to wake up, "ow! My head! What... what happened?" he then straightened his glasses, only to realize that one of the lenses were broken, "oh man! My mom's gonna kill me!"

"Never mind that, Jackson!" said Lilith, "what happened to Clair!"

Chad then woke up, "did anyone catch the license plate of that jerk?" he asked in a groggy tone.

"Pull yourself together, man!" snapped Lilith, "where's Clair!?"

"Clair?" Jackson asked. He then blinked in shock as he remembered, "oh no! They took her!"

"Those psychos!" said Chad, "two of them ambushed us. They knocked us down and grabbed Clair."

"They took her," said Jackson in an angry and depressed tone, "and there wasn't anything I could do to stop them!"

"We'll get her back," said Frankie in a determined tone, "I don't know how, we'll save her." At that Clawdeen, Lagoona, Kairi and the others nodded in agreement.

... Hogwarts...

"Well, that was...." said Aiden after he, Roxas, Naminé, Max, Harry, Jill, Andrew, Tara and the others watched the battle in the museum gallery via the dimensional viewer. "That was... that sucked!" he exclaimed, "that sucked to high heaven! What the hell are The Trix doing on that world?!"

"Stealing the Necronomicon, obviously," said Malfoy.

"Just why are you still here, Malfoy?" Ron asked.

"Someone has to make sure nothing else happens at Hogwarts," said Malfoy, "where as you, Weasley, trouble always follows you, Granger and Potter."

"It's not like we wanted trouble, Malfoy," said Hermione, "it just happens to us."

"Can we focus on the true issue here?" Andrew asked, "Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, along with out other selves, just got their asses handed to them by three insane witches!"

"You call them witches?" Tara asked irately, "I didn't see a wand between them! I doubt they even know what to do with a wand."

"And did you see how they dressed?" Kylie asked, "how fashionably incompetent can they get?"

"They don't care about that, those three are totally crazy," said Roxas.

"And they have Violet," said Jill in a distant tone, "while the other John and Rebecca are dead."

"And my other self is scarred," said Jessie.

"It's happening again," said Max, "just like before."

"What are you talking about?" Naminé asked.

"On our world, when The Necronomicon was taken," said Jessie, "two Bureau agents were killed at the gallery event, while a third was abducted along with the book." She then touched her scars, "while I got these as a going home present. Just you wait. The other Patricia is going to order my other self back to H.Q."

"It's almost like the worst case of déjà vu ever," said Leon.

"But if you know what's going to happen," said Ron, "we can do something about it."

"There's just one problem," said Harry, "we can't get to this other world yet."

"We're working on it," said Ashley, "we just need more equipment."

"And just what equipment will this be?" McGonagall asked.

"And how long will it take to get set up?" Aiden asked.

"Not too long, hopefully," said Ashley, "just have to go through more bureaucratic bull crap and we'll have what we need pretty soon."

"And just what is it that you need?" Aiden asked.

"A portal projector," said Ashley, "the dimensional scanner and viewer already found our missing friends, so all we need to get there is the right portal frequency, which is what the projector is for."

"And exactly how long will it take to get it here?" Harry asked.

"Roughly the same amount of time to ship it from Washington to London," said Ashley, "then up to Edinburg, then to Hogsmeade, then to fortify it against magic, bring it to Hogwarts, hook it up to the computer and we're ready to go, in roughly... another day or so."

"By that time, the other Jill will have killed The Trix without us!" said Aiden.

"And we still need to find Kairi," said Naminé.

"No problem," said Ashley, "now that the scanner has found Sora and the others, it's been looking for Kairi and..." just then the computer beeped, "oh, it's found her!"

Ashley pushed a few buttons and the image changed. Now it showed Kairi with Frankie and the other Monsters in the wreckage of The Crystal Palace.

"She's safe," said a relieved Naminé, "thank goodness."

"Yeah, but what are those things she's with?" Roxas asked.

"Monsters," said Harry.

"Of course they are," said Draco dryly, "you can tell that they're freaks from a mile away."

"Monsters are people too, Mr. Malfoy," said an annoyed Tara.

"Until they try and devour you," said Draco.

"It's clear that Kairi's made friends with these creatures," said Max, "while our counterparts, Sora and the others have joined forces with more Monsters. We clearly have a conflict on two fronts here."

"The Trix, whom have the other Violet and The Necronomicon," said Aaron, "while whomever Kairi and her new friends had been fighting."

"Think the two are related?" Ginny asked.

"I'm more concerned as to why those vicious witches couldn't touch either Violet or the book," said Hermione.

"I have my suspicions," said Jill, "everyone, I think it might be a good idea to keep our Violet, John and Rebecca out of this, for now at least."

"I don't think they'd like the idea of knowing that they died on a parallel world," said Ron.

"Who does?" Roxas asked.

"All we can do for now is wait for the machine," said Ashley.

"The hell we can," said a determined Aiden, "just tell me about the individual parts of the portal projector, give me enough raw materials and I can transmute one right here at Hogwarts."

"You can do that?" Ashley asked in an astonished tone, "I know you're a brilliant Alchemist, but this is a highly sophisticated piece of equipment we're talking about. One misplaced part, one frayed wire, one cracked chip and the damn thing won't work, or blow up, or worse."

"What's worse than the machine exploding?" Ron asked.

"Instead of a portal," said Ashley, "it could create a black hole and devour the entire planet."

"That would be bad," said Hermione to Ron in an annoyed tone.

"I'd still like to try," said Aiden, "it'd be a lot quicker to make one, and probably a lot cheaper."

"It would save a lot of time," said Jill to Ashley, "and you'd save money on shipping it across The Pond."

"I guess that's reasonable," said Ashley in a contemplative manner, "alright, we'll try it Aiden's way."

"Yes!" said Aiden triumphantly.

"But I'm supervising this project," said Ashley in a stern tone, "I have all the technical specs on the device in my head, which may I add, I remember perfectly, so I'll be able to describe the individual parts precisely."

"I wouldn't have it any other way," said Aiden.

"In the meantime," said Max, "we'd better get ready on our part."

"Tell us everything you know about The Trix," said Jill to Roxas and Naminé. "If we're going to help Sora and our other selves, then we need all the information on the enemy as we can get."

"And learn about this enemy that Kairi's facing," said Tara.

"Precisely," said Jill.

"We'll tell you what we know," said Naminé, "but... I'm sure there's more too it."

"The Trix used to work on their own," said Roxas, "but then they teamed up with Darkar. This time... they've got to be working with someone else. They're tough and vicious, but there's no way they could have trashed our friends and those other Ramblers so easily."

"Hey, give us some credit," said Leon, "we tried, I mean, the other us tried."

"And failed," said Max, "I'm with Roxas on this. Someone spilled the beans about the security plans for The Necronomicon, someone who's allied themselves with The Trix."

"Whoever that is," said Jill, "they've taken the other Violet. And if I know myself as well as I think I do, then the other me will tear hell itself apart in order to get Violet back, and God help those three lunatics if they face the other Jill again."

The end of chapter 4.

Next chapter finds our heroes regrouping and planning to strike back at their respective enemies. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie! See you then!

Regrouping to Retaliate

Last time found our heroes and allies battling an alternate version of The Trix, whom had crashed the gala in order to steal The Necronomicon. Despite the best efforts of Sora, his fellow Keyblade Wielders and The Bureau, the trio of vile witches remained one step ahead of them, countering their every move, even so far as murdering two Bureau agents; John Baxter and Rebecca Covington. Just when The Trix were about to snatch the dark book, Violet grabbed it. When Icy, Darcy and Stormy tried to take the book from Violet, they found they couldn't touch her, so they kidnapped Violet, with The Necronomicon still in her hands.

Elsewhere, Kairi, Frankie and her fellow Monsters, were forced to fight the insidiously insane Lucas Vega and his cabal of mad Monster Haters. The fight resulted in a draw as Lucas and his gang retreated, yet they left the Monsters at The Crystal Palace in a sorry state, not to mention ruining the club to boot. Frankie and her friends suffered only moderate wounds, but they were shocked to realize that one of their human friends, Clair, had been taken by the Monster Haters.

Back at Hogwarts, Aiden and the others watched the fight at the museum gala, then located Kairi, but were unable to do anything about it, yet. Ashley and Aiden came up with a plan to build a portal projecting device at Hogwarts. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 5: Regrouping to Retaliate

"So these witches, these Trix," said Max as he paced back and forth, "they not only can fly and teleport, they all have different powers."

Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm had just spent the past few minutes telling the Meta Humans and Monsters about Icy, Darcy and Stormy, specifically about their powers and personalities.

"And their powers reflect their names," said Draculaura as she too paced back and forth, "ice, weather and darkness."

"And they're horrible dressers," said Cleo, "I mean, honestly, who are they trying to impress with those outfits of theirs? And there is such a thing as too much makeup."

"I'm concerned about those items they had," said Clawd, "those... what'd you call them, Sora? Gloomers?"

"Gloomix," said Sora, "Darkar gave them to The Trix."

"They seriously amplified their dark magic," said Tess, "it took almost everything The Winx and Specilists had to hold their own, or so we heard."

"If Bloom and her friends hadn't earned their Charmix, they wouldn't have stood a chance," said Malcolm, "but that's just my opinion."

"I'm starting to like these Winx," said Duce.

"Me too," said Clawd.

At that Ghoulia moaned something in an admonishing tone.

"No, we're not saying that because they're extremely beautiful girls in hot outfits," said Clawd in an annoyed tone.

"You're crushing on fairies!?" exclaimed Draculaura, while tears of heartache filled her eyes.

"Of course not!" said Clawd hastily, "but, you gotta admit, having wings is really cool."

"Oh, you're just saying that because I don't have all my vampire powers!" wailed Draculaura as she began crying, "you're saying that because I can't transform into a bat!"

"Oh, there you go again, Clawd Wolf!" said an irate Cleo, "upsetting Draculaura like that. And you, Duce Gorgon, don't think you're off the hook either!"

Ghoulia moaned something.

"Good point," said Cleo. "If Clawdeen were here, she'd beat him senseless with a rolled up newspaper."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"A Sunday edition?" Cleo asked, "now that's asking for too much."

"I call it overkill," said Steven.

"Hey, I'm not saying that fairies are better than vampires," said Clawd to Draculaura, "you're both equally awesome."

At that Draculaura began to calm down somewhat, "you... you really mean that?" she asked.

"D, those Winx can wear all the sparkly outfits they want," said Clawd, "I'd still pick you any day of the week."

At that Draculaura cooed happily as she threw her arms around Clawd's neck and peppered his face with kisses.

"Don't I get a make-up hug and kiss?" Duce asked Cleo.

"When I feel like it," said Cleo as she stubbornly crossed her arms.

"I think we're getting off track here," said Riku.

"Damn right we are!" snapped Jill as she sharpened a cutlass she retrieved from a pirate exhibit elsewhere in the museum, honing it to an edge finer than a razor, "how much longer do we have to sit here and wait?!"

"Jill, I know you're upset about Violet," said Patricia, "but..."

"Don't you give me any butts, Patricia Walker!" snapped Jill as she stood up, tossing her whetstone aside and testing her cutlass on a broken piece of a vase, slicing the ceramic shard in half, "I'm so mad, I could kill someone on general principal!"

"I'm mad too, Jill!" said Max, "mad enough to tear half the city apart! But I'm not going to, and you know why?"

"Because you're too good a person to let your emotions run away with you," said Jill, "you're too good to give in to the darkness. But unlike you, you don't have children. You don't have a daughter who has been kidnapped!"

"You mean stepdaughter," said Steven. He then found Jill's cutlass less than a millimeter from his throat.

"The law be damned!" snapped Jill, "I love Violet as if she were my own flesh and blood!"

"Damn it, Jill!" shouted Aaron, "calm down! You're gonna burst a blood vessel if you keep this up!"

"I'll sever your blood vessels if you don't get out of my way!" snapped Jill, "I'm going to go find Violet and kill those witches if it's the last thing I do!"

"It will be the last thing you do if you don't calm down!" snapped Max, "we need a plan, we need to bring in the Trackers, we need..."

"You need to leave me alone, Max!" snapped Jill, "or we'll see just how indestructible you are!"

"Is she always like this?" Duce asked Tess.

"The Jill I know wasn't this crazy," said Tess.

"Jill, we're doing everything we can to find Violet," said Patricia, "but going off halfcocked won't save her! You saw how vicious those witches were. They had nearly all of us on the ropes with one blast."

"And we lost two of our own tonight," said Julia in a somber tone as she cleaned her double-barreled riffle. John and Rebecca had been removed from the gallery, while Julia had freed her Nitro Express riffle from John's frozen grip.

"They killed John and Rebecca!" snapped Felicia as she cleaned one of her knives, "Jesus Christ, Jill! They killed John and Rebecca!"

"We're all freaked out by this," said Patricia, "especially the little ones."

Jill then saw that Klaus and Sunny were right behind her, with both children looking like they were barely able to contain their sadness and anger over the abduction of their big sister.

"If I were a mother," said Laura to Jill, "I'd be right here with them."

"Oh," said Jill in a stilled tone. She then dropped her cutlass and rushed over to Klaus and Sunny, enveloping them in her arms. The two children began crying, while Jill offered words of encouragement and comfort, "it's going to be alright, my dears, we're going to get Violet back."

"How?" Klaus asked between tears, "those witches are pure evil, worse than Olaf."

"Olaf is a liar, a thief, a coward and the worst actor who ever lived," said Jill, "he can't hurt you anymore. Those witches, I'll admit they're something else. But I'm not going to let them get away with this! I swear it, they'll pay for this."

At that Sunny burbled something that could be translated as 'but those witches are so powerful.'

"They surprised us, that's all," said Jill, "next time will be different, I promise."

"Indeed it will be different," said Cleo, "Those witches have The Necronomicon! My father entrusted me with representing the family at this gala. The Trix's actions are an affront to the de Nile family! I demand satisfaction! And I will have The Necronomicon back! Now!"

"We can't get it back until we find them," said Patricia, "I already called Bureau H.Q. in Washington. Our Trackers are on the case and will let us know what they find soon enough."

"How good are your trackers?" Clawd asked, "because if I can pick up the scent of those witches, I can find them in a heartbeat."

"Our Trackers are psychics whom can find just about anyone or anything," said Laura, "there are many different types of ESP abilities, aside from telekinesis and telepathy."

"Some of us can Scan minds," said Leon. He then looked at Katina, "which bring us to the \$64,000 question. What the hell is going on with you?"

"How did you know that The Trix were here?" Riku asked Katina, "who told you?"

"And why are you even in New York when you're supposed to be recovering back home?" Aaron asked, "Katina, what happened to you?"

"You really want to know?" Katina asked.

"Well, we really can't do anything else until the Trackers call us back," said Patricia, "so you might as well tell us your story."

"Alrighty," said Katina, "here's what happened. Jill, when you visited me the other day, I was still recovering. Sure, I was on the road to normalcy, but I still had a long way to go before I could comfortably leave my house or use my powers."

"At least you weren't a complete shut in," said Jill as she sat down with Klaus and Sunny.

"I was thinking about getting a cat or two," said Katina, "well, just this afternoon, while I was trying to decide if I wanted to watch TV or buy something online, when I had a premonition of the witches. I saw flashes of The Magical Dimension, of The Winx and their boyfriends, as well as a few scenes of Sora and his friends," she then looked at Sora, "hi."

"Nice to finally meet you," said Sora, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm nodded in agreement.

"And then I saw The Trix stealing The Necronomicon," said Katina, "after that things got confusing."

"More confusion than normal?" Max asked.

"Is anything we do normal?" Katina asked, "anyway, I saw several conflicting visions of the future. One showed us stopping The Trix from stealing the book, while others showed the witches getting away with the book, as well as kidnapping someone, I couldn't tell who, and don't blame me about it, Jill! I didn't know Violet would be here tonight!"

"I'm saving my wrath for the witches," said Jill as she retrieved her cutlass and sheathed it.

"Moving on," said Katina, "and before I forget, I also saw Ms. de Nile and all her friends from Monster High," she then looked at Cleo, "nice to meet you."

"Likewise," said Cleo, while Duce, Draculaura, Clawd and Ghoulia nodded in agreement.

"All in all," said Katina, "my visions showed me that unless we recover the book, The Trix and their allies will use it to destroy this world. They think they're going to use it in order to gain power, but

the forces they'll unleash will plunge the world into unending chaos and damn every living soul to eternal madness and death."

"I hate it when villains think they're gaining power but are only putting innocents and themselves in mortal danger!" said Tess irately, "that asshole Gideon thought freeing Light Yagami would bring out an age of evil, when in reality it would have unleashed chaos everywhere."

"Let's not forget what happened when Maleficent and Xehanort messed around with Kingdom Hearts," said Riku.

"I wish I could," said Sora.

"Okay, we have a general idea what The Trix are up to," said Patricia.

"And I know where The Trix are going," said Katina, "Rebecca used her emphatic ability to look into the past when she tried to choke Stormy. And when she asked me to Scan her mind, I saw what she saw."

"Then where the frak are they!?" exclaimed Jill.

"Jill!" exclaimed a shocked Laura, "please! Not in front of the baby!"

"Oh, sorry," said Jill in an embarrassed tone, "I really should watch my language from now on."

At that Sunny burbled something that could be translated as 'okay.'

"Moving right along," said Katina, "I saw that The Trix have teamed up with a group of insane teenagers."

"The Trix are insane," said Malcolm.

"Well, these kids are real nutcases," said Katina, "not only do they hate Monsters with a vengeance, they're doped up on DNA-altering drugs."

"Monster Haters?" Cleo asked in an astonished tone, "on drugs? Oh my Ra!"

"I thought we stopped all the hate on Halloween," said Draculaura.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Ghoulia's right," said Cleo, "there'll always be people who fear and hate Monsters."

"This is one of those times when I wish you were wrong," said Duce to Ghoulia, whom then moaned something that could be translated as 'me too.'

"What else do you know about these drug-addled, prejudiced teens?" Max asked.

"Only that they've been driven mad by the drugs," said Katina, "they weren't all right in the head to begin with, but the drugs they're taking, drugs that grant them strength, speed, endurance and rapid healing, making them equal in power to most Monsters, while their leader thinks he's some kind of dark messiah, that he's going to lead a revolution that will rid the world of Monsters."

"If everyone would just take a moment and think about what they hate so irrationally," said Laura, "the world would be a much better place."

"Tell that to the Monster Haters," said Katina.

"I'd like to know more about this drug they're taking," said Aaron, "I think I know what it is, but I need to do a little research."

"You'll get all the info you want when we catch them," said Katina, "they've got a base set up in an abandoned warehouse on The Lower East Side."

"Where?" J.D. asked as he used a Tablet to pull up a map of Manhattan, focusing on the Lower East Side.

"I... I'm not sure," said Katina, "I remember seeing The Williamsburg Bridge, so it's on or near the shoreline, but that's all I can tell for now."

"It's a good start," said J.D. as he programmed the Tablet to focus on the famous bridge, "there's only so many abandoned warehouses in the city, and even fewer in a specific neighborhood. Give me a few minutes and I'll narrow it down."

"There's more," said Katina, "I saw a church."

"Was it a Catholic church?" J.D. asked, "Protestant? Episcopal?"

"I don't know what denomination," said Katina, "I... let me think."

"Take your time," said J.D. "just go over the visions again, but don't rush it."

"There's one more thing that I'm positive I remember," said Katina, "but it's still not a clear fact. I know for sure that there's a third partner in this vile plot, a woman who's even crazier than the Monster Haters and witches. That's all I know for sure, but it's definitely a triumvirate. I'm sorry, but that's all I got out of the visions."

"You were brilliant," said Patricia, "and quite extraordinary for your first mission in a long time."

"Hold on a second," said Aaron, "Katina's my patient and I haven't fully cleared her for any missions yet," he looked at Katina, "you've been on convalescing for years, you're out of shape."

"I've been working out," said Katina in an insisting manner, "remind me to thank whoever it was that gave me that treadmill and weight machine for my last birthday."

"That was me," said Max.

"Oh, thanks," said Katina, she then looked at Aaron, "you want to give me a physical? Play doctor a bit?"

"I am a doctor, damn it!" snapped Aaron, "and even if your physical passes muster, you still need a psychological checkup. Your battle with Shannon Revek left you a breathing vegetable. I admit you've made phenomenal progress, but you could still have a relapse. Any psychic trauma could leave you catatonic again."

"It's a risk I'm willing to take," said Katina, "I'll sign any waiver you want, doctor, freeing you of any and all responsibility for my wellbeing, but I've got to do this."

"We do need all the help we can get, Aaron," said Patricia.

"Oh for Ra's sake!" snapped Cleo, "just let her come with us! Every second we delay is another second those witches get further away with the book! We have to get it back!"

"We will get it back, after we figure out where to go," said Leon.

"Just chill out, Cleo," said Duce, "this isn't really that big a deal."

"Uh, it kinda is," said Clawd.

"Those witches are going to use the book and rip the world apart!" said Draculaura.

"Forget about the world!" said Cleo, "what about me!?"

"What about you?" Tess asked.

"I came to the museum in place of my father," said Cleo, "he gave me the responsibility of representing the family during the unveiling of The Necronomicon. Do you have any idea how mad my daddy will be when he finds out that the book was stolen while I was here?"

"What, is he gonna take away all your credit cards?" Laura asked, "make you were nothing but discount, knockoff clothes and accessories?"

"Or maybe clean the pyramids with her bare hands," said Steven in a joking manner.

"If only he were so kind," said Cleo in a depressed, dramatic manner, "no, my fate will be far, far worse."

"So, he'll ground you," said Deuce, "take away your phone and we'll probably not see each other for a while."

"It'll be a lot longer than a while, my darling, dashing Deuce," said Cleo morosely, tears beginning to fall from her eyes, "no, my father, he... he'll entomb me!" She then flung her arms around Duce and began crying into his chest, while he hugged her back.

"Oh no, not that," said a shocked Laura.

"Entomb?" Clawd asked, "that doesn't sound good."

"It's horrible," said Draculaura, "Cleo will be mummified again and locked in a sarcophagus."

"That doesn't sound so bad," said Sora.

"Are you serious!?" Julia asked.

At that Sora was a little taken aback, "well, I mean, she already is a mummy, so being wrapped up in bandages and put into a sarcophagus again won't be so bad."

"She was dead the first time they did it, you big, fatheaded dummy!" snapped Laura, "Cleo was resurrected along with her father and sister when archeologists read a spell in their family tomb. But this time around, she'll be mummified alive and locked away for who knows how long?"

"It could be decades before daddy lets me out!" wailed Cleo, "centuries!" she then looked up at Deuce, "I don't want to spend hundreds of years alone in the dark! I don't want to leave you,

Deuce!" she then buried her head in his chest again and bawled her heart out.

At that Jill walked over and placed a comforting hand on Cleo's shoulder, "hey now, it's going to be alright."

"How?" Cleo asked between sobs, wiping her eyes and further smudging her already wet makeup, "how can everything be alright? Your daughter's been kidnapped, the book is gone and I'm going to be buried alive!"

"Not if we get the book back," said Jill, "your dad can't punish you if we recover The Necronomicon, right?"

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"She's right," said Draculaura, "sure, Cleo's father will still be pretty upset, but he can't entomb Cleo if we stop those witches from destroying the world."

"We've still got those Monster Haters to deal with," said Clawd.

"Them too," said Draculaura.

"And that unknown third party," said Katina.

"And that," said Draculaura, "but other than that, we'll still be alright." She then frowned, "unless something else happens that'll really mess things up."

"We'll worry about that when the time comes," said Patricia. She then walked up to Cleo, "I can promise you two things! First, we'll do everything we can to recover The Necronomicon," she eyed Jill, "and save Violet, that's the first promise, in two parts. The second part," she then looked at Cleo, "is that no matter what happens, The Bureau won't let your father bury you alive."

At that Cleo wiped her eyes, further smudging her running eye makeup, "you... you'd do that for me? You'd defy my father?"

"You wouldn't be the first Monster The BPRD helped in a time of need," said Patricia, "true, you're still a minor in the eyes of the law, but the law can be bent when in the face of cruel and unusual circumstances. And being buried alive is definitely cruel and unusual."

At that Patricia then frowned, "which brings be to a somewhat unpleasant duty. Jessie, I want you to go back to the hotel."

"What?" Jessie asked. Aaron had stitched up the cuts, administered a healing salve bandaged them, though her cuts were still bleeding slightly, "No! I can't go back to the hotel! I'm fine, Patricia, honestly!"

"No, you're not," said Patricia, "you nearly lost an eye tonight."

"But I didn't," said Jessie, "I can keep going!"

"I know you think you can," said Patricia, "but I say otherwise," she then looked at Aaron, "wouldn't you agree with me, Dr. Spartan?"

"Are you asking me as a physician or as a friend?" Aaron asked, "because I'd rather not..."

"I'm asking you as the foremost medical expert in The Bureau," said Patricia in an insisting manner, "and I want your honest opinion. Is Jessie alright to remain in the field?"

At that Aaron looked at Jessie, his eyes betraying his reluctance, "well, as a physician, I'm forced to say no. Sure, the bleeding is slowing down, the cut should be fully clotted in a minute or so, but her optic nerves may have been damaged, the same could be said for her retinas and corneas. I'm sorry, Jessie, but I cannot allow you to remain on duty until you've had a more thorough examination."

"You're letting Katina stay without an examination!" said Jessie.

"I said I would sign a waiver!" Katina said.

"I'll sign one too!" said Jessie.

"Two wavers in one night is more than I'm willing to put up with," said Aaron, "'I'm sorry, Jessie, but I just can't let you put yourself at risk. As far as I can tell, Katina is fit for duty," he then glared at Katina, "but you'll be benched the second I suspect you are unable to perform your duties."

"If I'm too crazy to get The Necronomicon back," said Katina, "I'd expect nothing less."

"Where as you, Jessica Elmsworth," said Patricia, "you're lucky you didn't have your face ripped off."

"I'm sorry, Jessie," said Aaron, "but I just can't let you continue on the mission."

At that Jessie touched her head above her eyes, "well, if you think it's for the best, then I'll go back to the hotel." She then looked at Patricia, "with your permission, I'd like to go right this minute."

"Granted," said Patricia, "and Jessie..." But Jessie was already heading out of the gallery, an irate expression on her face.

"I doubt she's happy with either of you," said Sora to Patricia and Aaron.

"She'll forgive us in due time," said Patricia.

Just then Katina shouted, "I remember! It was a Catholic church! And a block to the east, there was a synagogue! To the north was a police building, and to the north of the bridge, there was a Dominican restaurant."

"She's talking about St. Mary's Church," said J.D. as he read the data on his tablet, "to the east is Bialystoker Synagogue, while to the north is the New York Police Department building. North of the bridge is La Isla Café, 212 Delancey Street. There's a condemned warehouse at 251 Delancey Street!"

"That's it!" said Katina.

"We can be there in less than twenty minutes if we take FDR Drive!" said Julia after she got directions online.

"Then let's go already!" said Clawd.

"Wait, we need to hear from the Trackers!" said Laura.

"We can't wait," said Katina.

"I agree," said Patricia, "time is of the essence. If the Trackers call with a different destination, we'll follow them. But for now, we're going to Delancey Street."

"After a quick wardrobe change," said Cleo.

"Of course," said Patricia.

Just then Cleo's phone rang, "it's Frankie," she said as she read the caller I.D. She then answered the call, "Frankie, what's wrong?... What! Slow down! You're not making any sense!"

... The Crystal Palace...

"I said we were attacked by Monster Haters and they took Clair!" said Frankie as she irately paced back and fourth.

Monster paramedics had arrived to help the wounded, while Kairi, Frankie, Clawdeen, Abbey, Heath, Lagoon and Gill had changed back to their normal attire. Chad was now wearing a pair of jeans, a blue shirt with a checkered pullover, while Lilith wore a leopard print shirt and pants with knee-high leather boots, her hair tied back in a knot. Clawdeen and Howleen were sniffing around for a scent, while Toralei was standing to one side, looking as if she was trying to decide what to do next. Chad with sitting with Jackson, who was looking thoroughly miserable.

"We're trying to figure out what to do next, Cleo," said Frankie, "first we have to find the crazies who took Clair."

"How's calling Cleo gonna help us find Clair?" Heath asked, "she's all the way over in New York City!"

"At least the rest of our mates would know what kind of mess we're in," said Lagoon, "they might be able to help us, somehow."

"I'll tell you this," said Lilith, "Lucas and those other maniacs had better be on good terms with their guardian angels, because I'm going to send them all to hell!"

"Getting upset won't save our friend," said Kairi, "I should know, I've been in this kind of mess before."

"You'll have to tell me about it sometime," said Lilith. She then frowned, "but why? Why did Lucas take Clair? She's human with no special powers, not that I have anything against Clair. We're not the best of friends, but I wouldn't wish this on her, ever."

"Maybe Monster-hating bullies take Clair as hostage," said Abbey, "to make us bow to their demands of evil."

"If they really wanted to kidnap Clair to make us do something for them," said Lagoon, "then they would have told us their demands by now."

"They can call us any time they want," said Kairi, "maybe Lucas just wants us to sweat for now."

"Yeah, that's Lucas's style," said Lilith.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Frankie into her phone, "three evil witches from another world have taken The Necronomicon!?"

"Evil witches?" Kairi asked in a suspicious tone.

"Say what now?" Clawdeen asked as she walked over, followed by Jackson and Chad.

"Are you telling me that the most dangerous book in existence has been stolen?" Jackson asked.

"Wait, hold on a second, Cleo," said Frankie, "you faded out for a second... uh-huh... yeah... okay, if we can, we'll come help... no, you go get the book back, we'll save Clair... okay... okay, bye." She then hung up.

"Care to enlighten us to the situation, Frankie?" Lilith asked.

"Cleo said that the gala was crashed by three horribly evil witches," said Frankie, "the... wait, what did she call them? The Tricks? The Trickies?"

"The Trix!" said Kairi, "I knew we hadn't seen the last of them!"

"You know these witches?" Lagoon asked.

"Wish I didn't," said Kairi, "if these are the same dark witches I've faced before, then Cleo and her group are way over their heads."

"How bad can they be?" Gill asked.

"One of them is a mistress of weather magic," said Kairi, "Stormy can summon a hurricane that'll rip you apart."

"I've lived through hurricanes," said Lilith.

"Not like the storms this witch can call up," said Kairi, "then there's Darcy. Give her a chance and she'll scramble your mind, or take control of your mind, depending on her mood."

"Is that all she does?" Heath asked, "we'll just throw a zombie or two at her. They don't have any brains to scramble."

"Don't let Ghoulia hear that," said Clawdeen.

"All three of them are worse than you think," said Kairi, "but the absolute worse of them is the eldest, Icy. Like her name, she'll freeze you solid."

"We shall be seeing about that," said Abbey as she confidently crossed her arms.

"Individually, they're a handful, and all but unstoppable when together," said Kairi.

"You can tell us more about them on the way to New York," said Clawdeen.

"We can't abandon Clair to those drug-addled lunatics!" said Jackson.

"We're not abandoning her," said Frankie, "that's what Cleo was telling me. She, Duce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia have teamed up with The BPRD and they're going to get the book back."

"The Bureau?" Lagoona asked. She then smiled, "well, if they're on the job, then those witches don't stand a dingo's chance in a supernova."

"What's a dingo have to do with a supernova?" Toralei asked as she sauntered over.

"It doesn't stand a chance in one," said Lagoona.

"Well, ask a silly question and you get a silly answer," said Toralei. She then clapped her paws together, "so, what are we gonna do about rescuing Clair?"

"What do you mean 'we?'" Clawdeen asked in a suspicious tone.

"Well, I'm going with you, of course," said Toralei.

At that Frankie and all her friends were taken aback. Even Kairi was momentarily left speechless.

Abbey finally spoke, "is this some kind of funny business?"

"No joke," said Toralei, "I really want to help save Clair."

"You don't even like Clair!" exclaimed Clawdeen as she leaned forward with her hands on her hips. "And you hate us!"

"That still doesn't mean I can't help," said Toralei, "what, just because I'm a bad kitty doesn't mean I can't be good now and then, right?"

"Since when have you ever done anything nice or selfless?" Frankie asked, "not that I don't want to believe that you're capable of being good, but you've got a lot of bad karma against you."

"Oh really?" Toralei asked, "I've done plenty of good things."

"Last year, you made the entire fear leading squad walk out on Cleo," said Clawdeen.

"Only because she was a power-hungry dictator of a fear leading captain," said Toralei, "I rejoined the squad."

"Only after Nefra said it would humiliate the rest of us," said Lagoona, "but before that, you tried to sabotage Frankie and the others at Gloom Beach! Then you tried to get the fear leading squad in trouble during graduation."

"And you ghouls paid me back by sending me and my best fiends to math camp for the whole summer," said Toralei, "I still have all that crap in my head," she then looked at Kairi, Chad, Jackson and Lilith, "ask me any math problem, and make it a hard one. Go on, ask."

"Uh... okay," said Kairi as she thought of a random problem, "what's the square root of... 837,991?"

"915.448," said Toralei.

"She's right," said Jackson as he worked the problem on a pocket calculator.

"Well," said Frankie, "you tried to ruin Draculaura's 1,600 birthday by bringing back her old boyfriend, Valentine."

"Only because you didn't invite me to the party," said Toralei.

"Only because you played all those horrible pranks on Draculaura!" said Clawdeen, "and you nearly got Draculaura's heart broken!"

"It really was a crisis," said Lagoona to Kairi, Chad and Lilith, "Valentine, he would have taken Draculaura's heart and broke it in half, just to satisfy his despicable desires."

"What a sicko," said Chad.

"That's not the worst of it," said Lagoona, "Toralei then made things worse by stealing Cupid's crossbow and screwed up a lot of relationships."

"Those arrows should have been labeled biohazards," said Jackson, "seriously, one hit and you fall in love with the first thing you see."

"And Toralei was enjoying every minute of the chaos," said Frankie.

"Well, you paid me back by making me and Valentine fall into a pit full of foul smelling slime," said Toralei, "it took me weeks to find the right shampoo to get the stink out. Okay, I admit it, I've done some pretty rotten things."

"That's not the worst part!" Lagoona exclaimed, "You sided with the Boulder City Gargoyles in SCREAM!"

"Skulltimate Roller Maze," said Frankie to Chad, Lilith and Kairi, "the most extreme sport in our world."

"And when we were just one game away from wining back the Monster High school crest and restoring our school spirit," said

Lagoona, "Toralei spied for the opposition!"

"And you had Operetta feed me false information to the Gargoyles," said Toralei, "you won anyway. Look, we can play the blame game until the next Mayan Long Count cycle, it still won't save Clair. You need all the help you can get against those maniacs."

"What about your best fiends, Meowlody and Purrsephony?" Gill asked.

"Where are twin cats?" Abbey asked.

"Ah, they had to go home early," said Toralei in a modest tone, "something about watching a marathon of Normie soap operas on TV," she then glared at Heath, "and before you even crack a smile, Heath Burns, I know for a fact that you've been TiVo-ing daytime soap operas for the past seven years."

At that, Heath looked horrified and embarrassed to no end, "how did you know that?" he asked.

"You have your dirty little secrets, just like everyone," said Toralei as she smiled mischievously.

"So, that's what it is, blackmail," said Clawdeen as she crossed her arms irately.

"Have I really made myself out to be so rotten?" Toralei asked in an offended tone, "is it really so hard to believe that I want to do something right and true?" at that she looked like she wanted to cry, "do you really believe that I'm a soulless creature with no compassion in her heart?"

"Actions speak louder than words," said Gill, "and you've used some pretty harsh words over the years."

"Oh, just give her a chance!" said Kairi, "if you open your eyes, you can see that she's being sincere, that she's speaking from the heart."

"You standing up for her?" Abbey asked.

"I'm willing to give her a chance," said Kairi, "she's been civil enough to me so far..."

"That's because I asked her to be nice to you," said Frankie, "and she only agreed because..." she then faltered, unwilling to say something she might regret.

"Because what?" Clawdeen asked.

"What did you promise her, Frankie?" Lagoona asked.

"I... uh..." said Frankie in an embarrassed and ashamed tone.

"If you won't tell them then I will," said Toralei, "Frankie here offered me a very lucrative deal. I be civil to our friend from another world for the duration of her stay and in return, I receive a \$500 prepaid debit card."

"Didn't Cleo give you a prepaid card for Christmas?" Lagoona asked.

"Yeah, I was saving it," said Frankie, "I didn't know what to do with it so I saved it. I thought that Kairi had been through enough and it was the only thing I could think of that would make Toralei leave her alone."

"I didn't need you to bribe your enemy for me," said Kairi, "I'm not that fragile!"

"You said that you saw a demon kill your boyfriend and turn the rest of your friends into out of control zombies," said Clawdeen.

"I did say that," remarked Kairi in a slightly distant tone, "but now that I think about it, I can't help but wonder if the whole thing was some kind of trippy nightmare brought on by a wasp sting."

"Must have been pretty bad wasp," said Abbey.

"Tell me something I don't know," said Kairi as she felt where the Tracker Jacker stung her arm.

"Well, if it's all the same to you," said Toralei, "I'm still going with you."

"Over my dead body!" said Clawdeen, "for all we know, you're working with those koozed up Monster Haters!"

"I fought with you all just now!" exclaimed Toralei, "you heard them! They want to wipe us all out! What do I have to do to convince you that I'm on your side!?"

"A lie detector test?" Chad suggested.

"That wouldn't be admissible in court," said Jackson, "and polygraphs can be fooled."

"I once heard of a really powerful truth potion," said Kairi, "Veritaserum."

"We don't have time to find a truth potion," said Toralei, "look, you want proof that I'm being honest, I'll give you one of my nine lives."

"You can do that?" a slightly taken aback Lagoona asked.

"You really have nine lives?" Kairi asked.

"All werecats have nine lives," said Toralei, she then licked the back of her left hand and smoothed out a stray lock of hair, "and I've got all of mine intact," she then looked at Clawdeen, "werewolves have their own code of honor, and so do us werecats. I'm putting one of my lives in your hands, Clawdeen Wolf, take it or leave it."

"Let me get back to you on that," said Clawdeen. She then signaled to Frankie, Abbey and Lagoona for a hushed conference that Kairi was able to overhear.

"What do you think?" Clawdeen asked.

"I think she's telling the truth," said Frankie, "Toralei really wants to help save Clair."

"But why?" Lagoona asked, "this is Toralei we're talking about. She's never done anything nice for us."

"She tried to make Frankie and I hate each other," said Abbey.

"And we did get her back for that," said Frankie, "but we can't keep getting revenge on each other forever. The cycle of hate has to stop sometime, so why not now?"

"I still don't trust her," said Clawdeen, "Toralei has never done anything nice for us."

"That's not true!" said Frankie, "remember, she did help stop Nefera from sabotaging us during Mashionals."

"Oh, yeah, she did do that," said Clawdeen, "that's probably the only nice thing she's ever done for us."

"So she does have some good in her," said Kairi as she walked over, "and now she wants to do more good."

"Do all Keyblade Wielders eavesdrop on other peoples conversations?" Abbey asked.

"Well, we do have a knack for meddling," said Kairi as she smiled.

"I'm convinced," said Lagoona, "let's give Toralei this one chance."

"In home village," said Abbey, "they say only fools are unable to forgive enemies."

"Well, I'm not still fully convinced," said Clawdeen stubbornly, "after all she's done, one act of decency isn't enough to change my mind."

"Well what can?" Kairi asked, "okay, let's think about this from a different angle. Toralei said that she has her own code of honor."

Maybe she owes you a favor."

"The only thing Toralei has ever owed us was payback and more payback," said Clawdeen.

"Not true," said Abbey, "she owes Frankie for the taking off of the cooties."

"That's right!" said a brightly smiling Lagoona, "Frankie did take those cooties for Toralei."

"Cooties?" Kairi asked in a tone that wondered if this was some kind of joke.

"It's really stupid, actually," said a mildly embarrassed Frankie, "cooties are real germs on this world, but they don't really make you sick. They just feed off of your fear as you're forced to pass them on to someone else."

"We used to be so afraid of cooties," said Lagoona, "that if you got them, you had to touch another bloke or you'll be ostracized at school."

"So, Toralei does owe a favor," said Kairi. She then looked at Clawdeen, "does this satisfy you?"

"I guess so," said Clawdeen.

"Then let's get this over with so we can save Clair," said Frankie. She and the others then walked up to Toralei.

"Come to a decision yet?" Toralei asked impatiently.

"We have," said Frankie, "you can help us, Toralei."

"You owe Frankie for time you had cooties," said Abbey.

"Oh, I completely forgot about that," said Toralei, "well, if that's how you want to do this, then okay, consider this making us even." She

then frowned slightly, "but don't think that after this we'll be friends. I just want to see Lucas and his cronies punished."

"And save Clair," said Lagoon.

"Of course," said Toralei.

Frankie then held out her hand, "if we can't be friends, then let's at least be allies."

"Allies it is," said Toralei as she shook hands with Frankie. She then shook hands with Kairi, Abbey, Lagoon, then with Heath, Gill, Chad and Jackson.

But when she shook hands with Clawdeen, the werewolf beauty squeezed her hand a little too hard, leaned in closer and looked Toralei with menacing eyes, "let's get this one thing straight," she said in a threatening tone, "you'd better be on the level, or I'll show you just how many ways you can skin a cat."

At that Toralei squeezed her hand harder and glared back at Clawdeen, "Don't push me and I won't push back, little doggy."

At that Clawdeen glared hatefully at Toralei, "then know this; you double-cross us, I will end you."

At that, Toralei glared hatefully at Clawdeen, "right back at you, bitch."

At that Clawdeen growled, while Toralei hissed.

"Oh, this is wonderful!" exclaimed an overjoyed Spectra as she took a picture of Clawdeen and Toralei, "two sworn enemies joining forces in the face of a great evil! What a scoop!"

"Do you have to do that now?" Clawdeen asked as she and Toralei separated hands.

"Are you kidding?" Spectra asked, "this is the kind of story a journalist dreams of covering! A rogue group of prejudiced Normies out to destroy all Monsters! An innocent girl has been taken hostage and it's up to her friends to save her from an unknown fate! And I get to cover every second of it! Pulitzer Prize, here I come!"

"Uh... okay," said Frankie, "but make sure you get all the facts before you post your next blog."

Just then Howleen spoke, "uh, if anyone's interested, I picked up Clair's scent!"

"You did!?" exclaimed Jackson.

"It's still strong," said Howleen, "we can still catch those bastards!"

"Then let's get going!" said Kairi, "and god help Lucas and his friends when we catch them!"

They all ran outside with Howleen leading them, following the scent of their abducted friend.

"They were really moving fast," said Howleen as they rushed down the street, then turned right onto another street, "they're trying to confuse anyone following them. We'll see about that. Wait!" she then held up her right hand and made everyone stop, "their scent, it's changed."

"Changed?" Frankie asked, "how?"

"It's different," said Howleen, "in the club, the maniacs all had a very sour odor about them, faint but sour."

"I smelled it too," said Clawdeen as she sniffed the air, "and it is different here."

"And they slowed down from here," said Howleen, "like they..."

"The drug must have begun to wear off," said Lilith, "they'll be weaker, slower, reduced reactions. We got them now!"

They all started running again and eventually reached an empty lot, which Howleen sniffed around, "The scent ends here."

"Well, where are they?" Lagoon asked.

"Not here, that's for sure," said Clawdeen.

"But they didn't just vanish," said Lilith, "even if they improved the drug, they couldn't have just vanished."

"Are you sure you tracked the scent right?" Chad asked Howleen.

"I beg your pardon?" Howleen asked irately, "are you disrespecting me?"

"I followed the same scent, Chad," said Clawdeen, "trust me, the nose knows."

"Then what happened?" Jackson asked, "where did they go?"

"I think we should backtrack and go over the trail," said Kairi, "we might have missed something."

"Good idea," said Frankie. They all then went back out to the street and retraced their steps.

But then Frankie saw four people hurrying towards the group, four that she recognized and introduced to Kairi.

Operetta was a southern belle with a New Orleans accent, a musical genius and a freedom-loving perfectionist, a free thinker, nonconformist and overall a ghoul with a heart of gold.

She had light purple skin and bright red and black hair with 50's inspired Victory Rolls, with flashy makeup, a music-related arm tattoo, and a similarly music themed scar on her face which she

covered with a spider web patterned, heart/musical note shaped eye mask. Her eyebrows were brown and her eyes were blue-grey. She also had a black beauty mark under the left side of her lips. She wore a white, 50's style shirt with puffed shoulders, knee-length jeans with black and white platform high heels with a spider web pattern.

Operetta's special power lay in her voice, capable of projecting an intense pulse of sound that could shatter stone.

Venus McFlytrap was warm-hearted girl with a great passion for the environment. Always ready to fight for her causes, she is willing to do whatever it takes to convince those around her to care for the world, even going so far as to use her special power of mind-controlling pollen to 'persuade' people to follow her ideals. But despite this, she preferred to use words to change people's minds before using her power. Not to mention her being a great friend, unless she catches someone ignoring a recycling bin, then all bets are off.

She had bright green skin with hot pink and green hair, which was shaved on one side and was swept to the left, with vines entangled around her arms, neck, and ankles. She wore a black and pink dress with pink tights, a black and blue jacket and pink wedgeie shoes.

Rochelle Goyle was a gargoyle from Scaris, a Monster version of Paris, France. Being a gargoyle, Rochelle grew up with a well-defined code of honor and duty, always willing to do what was right and true, but also taking into account the feelings of others and herself. She is curious about the world but always takes into consideration the pros and cons of every decision.

She had long, pink hair with pale teal streaks running through it. Her face was very animal-like, complete with striking, large pink eyes. On her back were tiny, stone wings, and on top of her head were horn-like ears. Her skin was speckled, giving it a stone-like appearance. She had bright pink lipstick with grey and light pink eye makeup. Her outfit consisted of a black and white top with a multi-patterned skirt, pink stockings and black open-toed high healed platform shoes.

Robecca Steam was a living robot, created over a hundred years ago out of clockwork and ran on steam energy. She is fun loving, kind hearted, always eager to make new friends, a bit of a klutz but willing to learn from her mistakes. She had cover brown metal skin with several patches, bolts and rivets including two gears on the backside of her calf. Her wavy hair is black with blue streaks with amber-gear like eyes. Her outfit consisted of black and blue steam punk dress and top with leather, knee-high high healed boots and goggles on her head.

"Sweet mama!" said Operetta, "we must have missed one hum dinger of a throw down, and not just the club party."

"We herd that the club was trashed by a gang of Monster hating hoodlums," said Robecca, "was anyone hurt?"

"Not too seriously," said Frankie, "Kairi helped a lot of our friends."

"Oh, the young lady from another world," said Rochelle, "pleased to meet you."

"I can't believe anyone could be so hateful," said Venus, "even for Normies. What those punks did was unforgivable!"

"They're not your average Normie," said Clawdeen.

"We figured as much," said Robecca, "everything about them seemed wrong."

"You saw Monster Haters?" Abbey asked.

"They were running faster than a greased pig at a county fair," said Operetta, "and one of them was carrying what looked like a person on his oversized shoulders."

"Clair!" exclaimed Jackson.

"They took her," said Clawdeen.

"Whoa, hold your gears a second," said Rebecca, "what's going on here?"

"Long story short," said Heath, "a bunch of Lilith's old friends are taking drugs that made them crazy."

"And their leader wants to wipe out all Monsters," said Gill.

" *Mon Deux!* " exclaimed Rochelle.

"Which is why we're going to stop them," said Toralei.

At that Rebecca, Rochelle, Venus and Operetta blinked in surprise and confusion.

"Beg your pardon?" Operetta asked.

"That's right," said Toralei, "I'm helping to stop those maniacs and save Clair."

"Either my hearing modules are malfunctioning," said Rebecca, "or you're actually doing something right and true for once."

"First time for everything, I guess," said Venus.

"She's being sincere about it, trust me," said Frankie, "but there's no time. Ghouls, did you see where they went?"

"We tracked them to that empty lot," said Howleen, "but the trail went cold. It's like they vanished, or were beamed aboard a spaceship."

"Oh, please," said Operetta, "there's no such thing as aliens."

"You'd be surprised," said Kairi.

"Well, we didn't see exactly what happened," said Venus, "but out of curiosity, we followed those punks for a bit."

"They were running like the devil himself wanted to challenge them to a fiddling contest," said Operetta, "but for some dang reason, they slowed down a bit."

"It was as if their mainsprings were winding out," said Rebecca.

"Or perhaps the drugs they were taking were wearing off," said Rochelle.

"I knew it!" said Lilith, "Lucas may have made the drug more potent, but he couldn't extend its effective time. Soma-99 is just as flawed as Soma-15!"

"That's when things got weird," said Venus, " when they reached the empty lot, one of those black-jacketed maniacs took out a strange device and used it to open this... this wall of swirling, color-changing light. It was kinda pretty, actually."

"They all then walked into the wall of light and vanished," said Rebecca.

"Sounds to me like they used a portal to escape," said Chad.

"How do you know about portals?" Heath asked.

"I play a lot of Dungeons and Dragons," said Chad.

"Trust me, he knows," said Jackson.

"Then they could be anywhere," said Howleen in a defeated tone, "Clawdeen and I can track them across the country, across the ocean even, but not through a portal."

"Don't give up just yet," said Kairi, "I want to take a look at where they called up that portal."

They all went back to the empty lot, where Rochelle pointed to a spot on the ground at the far end of the lot.

"My gut tells me it was a portal," said Kairi, "I think I can reopen it."

"You can do that?" Frankie asked.

"We won't know if I don't try," said Kairi as she summoned her Keyblade.

"Oh my ghou!" exclaimed both Operetta and Venus, while Rebecca and Rochelle were stunned.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of seeing that," said Lagoona.

"It is most impressive sight to be seen," said Abbey.

Kairi then pressed her wrists, '*Aiden*,' she thought, '*whether you and the others are still alive or not, this is for you.*' She then spoke, "Alright, let's do this!"

She then aimed her Keyblade at the spot where the portal was and shot a beam of white magic. The beam then opened a shimmering wall of multi-colored light.

"You're right, Venus," said Lagoona, "it is pretty."

"It could be pretty dangerous on the other side," said Gill.

"He's right," said Frankie. She then looked at all her friends, "we nearly got out butts torn off back at the club and it could happen again, or worse. Who knows what's on the other side of that portal? If anyone wants to back out, now's the time."

"Are you kidding me?" Clawdeen asked, "of course we're all going!"

"We are?" Heath asked. He then got a withering look from Abbey, "I mean, yeah! Of course we're all going!"

One by one, all of Frankie's friends nodded in agreement.

"Then let's go," said Frankie, her face set with determination, "just hold on, Clair, we're coming!" with that they all entered the portal, which closed up behind them.

... Someplace Else...

"I'll admit," said Violet as she stood in her energy cage, which had been hung from the rafters of an abandoned warehouse that was littered with broken glass, trash, empty storage bins and barrels and broken machinery, "you witches sure know how to pick a hiding place."

"We found it on Craigslist," said Icy as she sat in an overstuffed chair whose upholstery was torn in a few places, "it's not a 5-star hotel, but my sisters and I hid out in worse places."

"Trust me," said Stormy, "you don't want to know what holes in the wall we had to shack up in."

"I can imagine," said Violet grimly, "I'm also impressed that you witches know how to use the internet."

"We're used to far more advanced technology in our native dimension," said Darcy, "the primitive information networks of this world are so simple, a child could use it."

"They do," said Violet irately, "so, what now? You're not going to let me go," she then gripped The Necronomicon tighter, "and I'm not letting this go either."

"We are at an impasse," said Darcy as she walked around the suspended energy cage, "but this stalemate can't last forever. You have to eat, drink and sleep sometime."

"Or at the very least use the bathroom," said Stormy.

"Funny," said Violet, "I don't feel, tired, hungry or thirsty at all. I guess I should be worried about that."

"Yeah, what gives?" Stormy asked, "just why can't we touch either her or the book?"

"Well?" Icy asked Darcy. She then burped up another fly, earning a giggle from Stormy. "Damn it! How much longer am I going to do that!?"

"I figure that you are indeed cursed," said Darcy, "but instead of vomiting locusts for a thousand years, you're just going to burp up a thousand flies, but that's just my thoughts."

"Well, that sucks!" said an irate Icy as she crossed her arms, only to burp up another fly.

"That makes six so far!" laughed Stormy.

"What, are you my official fly-burp counter!?" Icy snapped.

"She might as well be," said Darcy, "anyway, I might know what's going on with The Necronomicon. This is just my opinion, but I think that the book is protecting her."

"What that's supposed to mean?" Stormy asked, "a book is a book. How can it protect anyone?"

"You really should have paid more attention in class," said Darcy, "this isn't any old book. This is The Necronomicon, a tome filled with incredible dark magic. This one book is responsible for the deaths of thousands of men, women and children across thousands of years. It has been through so much, it has achieved consciousness. In a way, The Necronomicon is alive."

"Really," said Icy in a disbelieving tone, "a living book."

"You can't be serious," said Stormy, "there's no such thing as a living book."

"I'm partial to agree," said Violet, "for what it's worth."

"You only believe that because the magic on your world is so primitive, it might as well be stage magic," said Darcy, "whereas our universe has magic so powerful, so awe inspiring, your feeble human mind would melt if you try to comprehend even so much as a fraction of it."

"My mind isn't feeble!" snapped Violet. "If only you know how many of my inventions saved myself, my brother and sister."

"Well, I don't see you inventing your way out of this, little girl!" said Stormy.

"Just give me a chance," said Violet, "I dare you!"

"You dare to challenge us!" said Icy, "the most powerful dark witches in The Magical Dimension?" She then burped up another fly.

"Seven!" laughed Stormy.

"If you're so powerful," said Violet, "how come you can't touch me?"

"I'm getting to that," said Darcy, "like I said, the book is alive on some level. From what our benefactor told us, this copy of The Necronomicon is the last of its kind. More so, until now, it hasn't been touched by human hands in over a year. Everyone who has handled it did so through protective gloves or it was transported via machine.

"You, Violet, are the first to touch the book in a long time. Because of such, the book seems to have formed an attachment to you, its handler. The book is using its own power to protect you and itself."

At that, Violet visibly shuddered. She then glared hatefully at the book in her hands. The idea that something so evil, something that had caused so much death and destruction, so much pain and suffering, was not only alive but also protecting her, it made her skin

crawl. Her every instinct was screaming at her to cast the book away, to throw it as hard as she could and run in the opposite direction.

But then, the logic in Violet kicked in. The gears of her creativity that helped save her life and the lives of her siblings time and time again against the villainy of Count Olaf began turning. Instead of inventing something, Violet's mind began analyzing the situation.

She was being held prisoner by three otherworldly magic users with dark powers the likes of which she had never seen, nor would have wanted to. She was trapped in a cage of energy, separated from all those she loved and those who wanted to keep her safe. She had in her hands the most dangerous book on Earth, and the witches had killed in order to get it. But they didn't have it. The witches couldn't touch her or the book.

Violet reason that it was possible that Darcy was lying about the book being alive. Maybe Darcy was trying to make Violet want to give up the book willingly, for whatever it was that was protecting them would stop once she let go of the book. On the other hand, if the book was alive and conscious, then perhaps it was protecting Violet because it didn't *want* to be held by the witches, that it needed Violet to keep it safe. If that was true, then perhaps, just perhaps, the book wasn't entirely evil. Perhaps there was a spark of goodness in it, despite its history of darkness. And if there was some good in The Necronomicon, then Violet would do whatever it took to keep it safe.

"You can have the book," said Violet, "when you pry it from my cold dead hands!"

"Damn!" said Darcy, "I was hoping that you'd let it go."

"Then you were lying!" said Violet triumphantly, "I knew it!"

"I also knew you weren't being serious about the book being alive," said Icy.

"I had no doubt about it," said Stormy.

"Oh, it's definitely aware of its surroundings," said Darcy, "and influence those surroundings. What, do you think that people just pick it up and read its spells on a whim? No, the book needs people to read it, otherwise it'd be as useful as an empty paint can."

"Well, this is one empty paint can that you're not having," said Violet.

"Keep thinking that, little girl," said Darcy, "I've broken plenty of wills back home. A stupid human girl like you won't last long."

"I'll last long enough for my friends and family to find me," said Violet.

"You really think those mutants and freaks will save you?" Icy asked. "That they'll come bursting through that door," she pointed to a large set of doors in a nearby wall, "charging in ready to save the day. Well, do you?"

Before Violet could answer, the doors did burst open. For one fleeting moment, Violet thought that Jill and the others would rush in and fight their way past the witches and save her.

But instead of her loved ones and friends, in walked Lucas and his gang, with an unconscious Clair being carried over the shoulders of Dalton. Lucas walked up to Icy.

"Frosqueen70," said Lucas as he grinned manically, "we meet at last."

"I'll admit, Killerfist819," said Icy, "you're shorter than I thought you'd be."

At that Eliza giggled like the lunatic she was. "Oh, you got burned, big boy, you got burned big time!"

"Shut up," said Lucas. He then looked at Darcy and Stormy, "and these must be your lovely sisters. How wickedly beautiful you all are."

"Save the charm, short stuff," said Darcy in an annoyed tone, "you're not my type."

"Not mine either," said Stormy, "and you're late. What kept you?"

"We would have come sooner," said Paulette, "but some of the Monsters put up a harder fight than we thought."

"Either that or the drugs aren't as potent as we thought," said one of the black-jackets.

Before anyone could say anything, Lucas rushed over to the one who spoke and snapped his neck.

"The drugs are fine," said Lucas as the dead body slumped to the floor, "Quantummad666 assured me that the new formula, Soma-99, was perfect."

"And you believed her," said Icy, "you've never even seen him, or her, or whatever, considering some of the freaks this world has." She then burped up another fly.

"Eight!" laughed Stormy.

"What the hell was that all about?" Paulette asked.

"She's cursed," said Darcy in a nonchalant tone.

"Oh, well," said Lucas, "just don't get any of it on me."

"You guys are strange," said Icy.

"Oh, and like your world isn't full of freaks," said Orlando, "yes, we know you witches are from another universe full of Monsters, just waiting to be purified."

"First this world will be cleansed of the taint of Monsters," said Paulette, "and then the rest of the galaxy, then the universe, then on to other universes, until all of time and space is free of the taint!"

"And Lucas shall show us the way!" said Dalton.

"And the way shall be paved with The Necronomicon," said Lucas, "so, Icy, where is the book?"

"She's got it," said Darcy as she pointed up at Violet.

"So you got one too," said Lucas as he looked up at Violet, "two down, one to go. But why does it have the book?"

"She's holding it and it's protecting her," said Stormy.

"Well, that's just stupid," said Eliza, "just take the book away."

"Try and take it yourself," said Icy, "We'll see how long you'll last before your hands catch fire.'

"It's a good thing that Quantummad666 gave us these items," said Darcy as she and her sisters looked at the stone accessories, "they're not as chic as our Gloomix, but they're just as effective."

"Which goes to prove," said Icy, "that magic trumps science."

"We'll see how your little bags of tricks match up with our science," said Lucas, "just as soon as Quantummad666 gets here, then the real fun shall begin."

"Assuming Quantummad666 has her sacrifice when she gets here," said Dalton as he placed Clair on the floor.

"Sacrifice?" Violet asked nervously.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Icy in a mocking tone, "I forgot to tell you. You're gonna die."

"We're going to sacrifice you and two other girls in a ritual," said Darcy.

"One that'll give us everything we want," said Stormy.

"Power and more of it!" said Lucas, "power to conquer, to rule, to be gods ourselves!"

"Oh, please," said Clair, whom had been faking unconsciousness for a while, "you bozos couldn't be gods even if the power was shoved down your throats."

"Oh look, it speaks," said Lucas, "the little freak-lover has been spying on us." at that his followers laughed cruelly.

"So you're going to sacrifice me," said Clair as she stood up, "and here I thought you only kidnapped me because I like to hang out with Monsters."

"You were just in the right place at the right time," said Paulette, "we could have grabbed any old human girl of your age, although your association with von Hellscream was an added bonus."

"I can't wait to see Lilith's face when she hears that we're gonna rip your heart out and burn your soul in a demonic fire!" said Eliza.

"It's a good thing I'm insured," said Clair, "so, what horrific, nightmarish creature are you going to sacrifice to? Cthulhu? Dagon? Shub-Niggurath? Nodens?"

"Close but no cigar," said Lucas, "no, this ritual is for Yog-Sothoth."

"That would have been my next guess," said Clair.

"Yes, we will summon Yog-Sothoth," said Icy, "tonight is this worlds Winter Solstice. As we speak, the fabric of reality is weakening. Soon the time will be right to begin the ritual and welcome Yog-Sothoth to this realm."

"And believe me, he'll be hungry," said Stormy.

"I'll bet he would be," said Clair, "Well, I'd like to go on record and say that you guys are either crazy or stupid. Messing with any Elder God, Outer God or Great Old One is the last thing you want to do."

Once you call forth one of those things, it's almost impossible to get rid of it."

"Unless you have The Necronomicon and know how to use it," said Darcy.

"You don't have it yet!" Violet shouted defiantly.

"We'll get it soon enough," said Icy. She then cast a spell that trapped Clair in another energy cage, then hung it from the ceiling a few feet away from Violet, "you just hang tight until Quantummad666 gets here with his sacrifice."

"And then we can summon Yog-Sothoth!" said Lucas, "and all our dreams shall come true!"

"You're insane!" said Violet, "all of you!" she then glared at Clair, "and you're crazy too!"

"Why'd you say that?" Clair asked, "is it because I'm so calm? Getting upset in a dire situation never did anyone any good."

"I agree," said Violet, "but cracking puns in the face of such despicable people isn't going to help us."

"Well, neither is just sitting back and sucking your thumb," said Clair, "waiting for the end to come."

"I'm not sucking my thumb," said Violet, "I'm hoping my friends and family will get here and stomp some guts. But I'm not going to sit and do nothing either."

"Neither am I," said Clair, "and my friends are also on their way too."

"Oh really?" Lucas asked.

"I know they are!" said Violet, "I've only known Jill for a short time, but I love her like she was my real mother. She'll dig her way to Hell and back in order to find me."

"Where as my friends will just kick your heads in," said Clair, "Lucas, you and your junkie friends, you got lucky tonight. Frankie and the others will be ready for you next time."

At that Lucas gave Clair and Violet a blood-chilling grin, "there won't be a next time."

"We figured that those freaks and mutants would try and follow us," said Icy, "so we left them a little present."

"Didn't you notice that when we teleported from the museum, we teleported again?" Darcy asked Violet.

"And how we opened a second portal after going through the first one?" Paulette asked Clair.

"That was just to throw the would-be heroes off our trail," said Paulette, "when they reach the decoy spot, they'll be in for a surprise they'll never forget."

"In the meantime," said Lucas as one of his followers pulled out a small backpack. Inside it was a black metal case that contained four jet injectors and several vials of a greenish blue liquid, "time for some more Soma-99."

With that he and his crew began administering doses of the drug, using the jet injector to take the doses right in their necks.

"Much better," said Lucas as he and his followers stretched and walked about, with some of them tearing apart the rusting machinery like it was made of paper.

"You girls should really try this stuff," said Orlando to The Trix, "it'll change your lives."

"We don't need that junk in our systems," said Darcy.

"We're plenty high on magic," said Stormy.

"You're all nuts!" said Violet.

"Maybe," said Icy, "but if you think about it, only real lunatics and psychopaths lose. So far, we're wining." She then burped up another fly.

"Nine!" laughed Stormy.

"And we will win," said Lucas, "when everything comes together, we will win."

... Hogwarts...

"What do you think?" Max asked Harry.

"About what?" Harry asked.

"About Katina?" Max asked.

"What about Katina?" Ron asked.

"Is she on the level?" Max asked, "our Katina never had any visions."

"I remember," said Jill, "with our Katina on the night the book was stolen, the thieves passed by her on the way to the museum. She was staying with friends in the city and read their thoughts without meaning to."

"I never was one to put much stock in Divination," said Hermione, "but, I've seen some incredible things involving Meta Humans, we all have. If this version of Katina Jones says she had a premonition of what was to come, then she did."

"I'm more concerned of what happens next," said J.D., "this Katina said she foresaw the deaths of two during the fight. I'm wondering if she foresaw any further deaths."

"If this timeline is proceeding the way ours did," said Jill somberly, "then we're going to see a lot of our friends die all over again."

"Then let's do something about it," said Harry, "Ashley and Aiden are working to get the new portal projector up and running. If they can get it working in time, maybe we can..."

"Change things," said Max.

"That would be meddling," said Jill, "that would be Sora's department."

"Sora and his friends are already meddling," said Harry.

"You seem awfully eager to stick your nose in a heap of trouble, Harry," said Leon.

"I thought you were always saying that you wanted nothing but a quiet life," said Aaron.

"I do," said Harry, "but I'm not one to ignore friends in need. If we can help save innocent lives, then we've got to try."

"But at what cost?" Max asked, "Harry, you saw how vicious those Trix were, and we all heard how strong and insane those junkie Monster-haters were."

"If you're worried that I won't come back from this one," said Harry.

"Then don't go," said Ginny, "not to sound like a coward, Harry, but maybe this is one you should sit out."

"She's right, mate," said Ron, "you've been the hero long enough."

"But if I don't go, who will?" Harry asked, "we can't let Aiden, Roxas and Naminé go alone."

"Who said they were going alone?" Max asked, "first of all, I can't go and neither can Jill. Our other selves are still alive on the other

world."

"As is my double," said Leon, "as well as doc here and they've got a J.D."

"And a Jessie Elmsworth," said Aaron, he then looked at this world's Jessie, "no offense."

"None taken," said Jessie as she wrote in her notebook, "and she's been benched just like I was. I felt just as upset, but I understand why Aaron did what he did, and the other me will understand too. Also, while they don't have a Harry, Ron, Hermione or Ginny, I have to argue that this would be a job for some younger heroes."

"We're not that old!" an irate Ginny asked.

"But youth would be a good idea," said Hermione.

"Well, I don't know who can go," said Jill, "as far as I know, nearly young Meta Human in The Bureau is occupied. I'll have to check to be sure, though, but..."

"I'll go," said Tara, "I want to go."

"I think not, Ms. Underhill," said Professor McGonagall, "you're still a student of this school."

"With all due respect, Headmistress," said Tara, "I am of age. Besides, Sora and the others are my friends. If I can help bring them home, and stop those vile witches and drug addicts, then I will."

"If she wants to go, Headmistress," said Jessie, "then let her," she then ran a finger along her scars, "but try to get to my other self in time. This event is when I get cut."

"How did you get cut, Professor?" Tara asked.

"I'll tell you when you leave," said Jessie, "however, I anticipate that our esteemed Headmistress would only let you go if you have

someone else go with you."

"Indeed," said McGonagall.

"I'll talk to my friends," said Tara, "and yes, Professor McGonagall, I'll only ask my fellow 7th years."

"I still feel that someone from The Bureau should go," said Jill, "I'm still thinking of who should go."

"We'll keep that in mind," said Max.

Just then Albus ran into the room, "Ashley and Aiden are getting the machine started!"

"Already?" Max asked.

A short time later found everyone in The Great Hall. The four House tables had been stacked to the side, giving Aiden and Ashley plenty of room. Laid out along the floor were dozens of blueprints and technical schematics.

"I thought you said they were putting the machine together, Albus," said Harry.

"They said they were ready to start," said Albus.

"I said we were ready to start making the parts," said Aiden, "just as soon as I have the raw materials."

Just then Neville, Angelina and Cho walked in, "we're set on our end," said Cho. She, Neville and Angelina, then pulled out their wands and cast spells that summoned several tones of sand out onto the floor of The Great Hall.

"Goodness!" exclaimed McGonagall, "where did you get all of that?"

"From Egypt," said Angelina, "Bill was more than happy to let us borrow some unused sand from the desert." She then looked at Ron

and Ginny, "oh by the way, Fleur's pregnant."

"What!?" exclaimed Harry, Albus, Ron, Hermione and Ginny.

"Aunt Fleur's going to have another baby?" Rose asked as she, Izzy and Scorpio walked in.

"Remind me to send them a present," said Draco dryly as he walked in. He then looked at the tones of sand, "what's this? Planning a castle-making contest?"

"With all due respect, Mr. Malfoy," said Ashley, "shut your trap!"

"I need to concentrate for the next few hours," said Aiden, "there's exactly six hundred and eighty one pieces to the portal projector, and I have to make them all from scratch."

"You also wanted this," said Neville as he handed a small bucket to Aiden.

"Perfect," said Aiden. He then took a scoop of sand from the bigger pile and poured it onto an empty space on the floor, then pressed his wrists, "alright, let's do this!" he then summoned his Keyblade, "here comes part number one!"

He then shot a bolt of Alchemic energy at the sand. In a flash of white light, the sand had become a microchip.

"Only six hundred and eighty to go," said Ashley.

"I knew I should have brought a book," said Ron.

The end of chapter 5.

Next chapter finds our heroes and allies as they attempt to rescue Violet and recover The Necronomicon, unaware they're walking into a trap. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Joining Forces

Last time found our heroes regrouping and planning to strike back at their respective enemies. At the museum, Katina used her powers to find where The Trix took Violet, while at The Crystal Palace, Howleen picked up the trail of Lucas and his fellow Monster Haters, leading Frankie, Kairi and the others to a portal location, which Kairi opened. Meanwhile, The Trix and the Monster Haters linked up, imprisoning Violet and Clair together, while revealing that our heroes and allies were walking straight into a trap. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 6: Joining Forces

"What do we know about this place?" Max asked as our heroes and allies had set up a base a block west of 250 Delancy Street. Cleo, Deuce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia had changed into their usual attire, as did Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, while the Bureau operatives now wore street clothes and their tan jackets. Mark was absent due to having been ordered back to the hotel headquarters for a classified aspect of the mission.

"The warehouse has been empty for years," said J.D., "it used to be a storehouse for construction material; concrete, cinderblocks, rebar and insulation. The construction company went belly up when the recession hit and it's been abandoned since."

"The perfect hiding place for a trio of alien witches," said Patricia.

"I don't know," said Riku, "this is The Trix we're dealing with. They may not want to hide out in such a derelict place."

"We don't really know them that much," said Tess, "how do we know what length those three witches will go to avoid capture?"

"And how far they'll go to hold on to their prize?" Malcolm asked.

"And their hostage," said Patricia She then looked to where Jill was anxiously pacing back and forth, while Klaus and Sunny sat nearby, also looking anxious.

"We can't go in until we know the layout of the warehouse interior," said J.D., "and then formulate a plan of action."

"That's easy," said Deuce, "just blast our way in, blast the witches, rescue Violet and grab the book."

"Violet may still have the book," said Draculaura, "for all we know, we can't touch it like the witches."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"You think The Necronomicon is protecting Violet?" Cleo asked, "why would it do that?"

"It's a book of incredibly evil magic," said Clawd, "it can do whatever it wants."

"Whatever the reason," said Max, "The Trix have both Violet and The Necronomicon. If we can save both, we definitely will," he then gave Jill a cautious look, "but if we have to save one, if we have to choose..."

"Then we save Violet and destroy the book," said Jill, "hopefully while killing those vile witches at the same time."

"The Trix we faced were sentenced to eternal imprisonment," said Malcolm, "in the worst place in my native universe."

"I was hoping to cut their heads off," said Tess, "while a friend of mine wanted to hang them."

"Decisions, decisions," said Felicia as she polished the blade of one of her knives, while Julia cleaned her pistols.

"If we can catch one of them alive," said Ken, "we'll cut her head off. If we get two or all three, then we can hang them."

"Fair enough," said Tess. She then pulled out her razor, "just so long as I can scalp one of them. I never tried scalping during my vengeance days. I always wanted to but never got around to it for some reason. Mostly because I was half crazy at the time."

"As far as I'm concerned," said Clawd, "most of you guys are crazy."

"This coming from someone who goes insane at the full moon?"
Laura asked.

"Hey, that's a biased misconception!" said Draculaura, "werewolves don't go crazy!"

"We just get a bit more aggressive and competitive at the full moon," said Clawd.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"No, I didn't forget that," said Clawd. He then looked at our heroes, "and we do get more reckless. But that doesn't make us crazy."

"Why don't we just agree on catching The Trix first?" Sora asked.

"Good idea," said Julia as she retracted her spring-loaded pistols, then checked her Nitro Express rifle, "catch 'em, then kill 'em." She then loaded a fresh pair of .700 cartridges and closed the breach.

"And save Violet, of course," said Felicia.

"Just as soon as we get a better idea of what's in there," said J.D. "alright, according to the data, the inside should be empty of construction material and equipment. The east wall has the main doors big enough for backhoes, bulldozers and cranes to move in and out. The north, south and west walls all have fire doors, while the roof is solid corrugated iron."

"So we can't burst through the skylight to surprise them," said Max, "and it'll take too long to dig a tunnel. So, I say we blow the hinges and locks on all the doors, toss in smoke grenades and flash bangs, then grab the witches before they know what hit them."

"Then we can hang and scalp them," said Felicia.

"Before the lawyers get their claws on them," said Ken, "those Harvard graduates would love to represent an alien terrorist, it'd be the highlight of their careers."

"The last thing we want is to get involved in a drawn out legal battle," said Patricia, "so what happens tonight stays within The Bureau," she then looked at the Keyblade Wielders and Monsters, "and our esteemed allies."

"I won't say anything incriminating," said Cleo, "just so long as the press isn't involved either. There's publicity and then there's bad publicity."

"Besides, your makeup is smudged," said Laura.

"It is?" Cleo frantically asked as she pulled out a hand mirror from her purse, "oh my Ra! I look absolutely frightful!"

"Oh, you don't look that bad," said Tess. She then glared at Laura, "and you, stop teasing her and her friends!"

"I'm not teasing anyone," said Laura innocently.

"Yes you are," said Tess.

"No, I'm not," said Laura.

"Yes you are," said Tess.

"No, I'm not," said Laura.

"Oh, for crying out loud," said an irate Katina. She then held out both hands and made a twisting gesture.

Both Tess and Laura cried out in pain and their hands went to their left ears.

"This is hardly the time and place to bicker like children!" said Katina, focusing her powers on twisting the ears of Tess and Laura a little harder, forcing them to their knees, "now, Laura, Tess, I may not know either of you really well, but one thing is for certain; stop pushing each others buttons! And you, Laura, stop teasing the Monsters! You're both being juvenile."

"Well, of course they're being juvenile," said Deuce, "they're teenagers."

"I still say they shouldn't be so mean," said Katina. She then released both Tess and Laura, causing them both to gasp in relief.

"Alright, that's enough," said Max, "we have a plan and we're going with it. Anyone else have a better idea, now's the time."

Cleo then raised her hand, "well, frankly, I think this plan is just plain stupid. How will making so much noise surprise those witches? Why can't we just teleport in? I have the right idol here, somewhere," she began rummaging in her purse.

"The last thing we need it to rely on unreliable magic," said Max, "I'm sorry, Cleo, but I've done my homework. Teleportation spells don't do well with non-Monsters."

"And I'm sure The Trix would have warded the warehouse against enemy magic," said Malcolm, "it's what I would do."

"If they've got wards on the outside," said Katina, "I can't sense them. Nor can I sense if there's anyone in there, not really."

"Me neither," said Laura, "They're jamming my senses with some kind of ward. But there's no reason why they wouldn't resort to physical booby traps."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Oh, that one would work," said Cleo as she pulled out a small statue of Isis from her purse, "this one will disarm any traps we come across."

"Are you sure that would work?" Sora asked, only to earn a look from Ghoulia that asked, 'are you kidding?'

"Ghoulia knows what she's talking about," said Deuce, "and if Cleo trusts her judgment, then so do I."

"Then we'll use that item to disarm any outside traps," said Max, "anyone else got suggestions? No? then let's get to it!"

It was decided that the group would divide into four strike units. Max, Katina, Leon, Sora and Cleo would take the front door. The north fire door would have Jill, Riku, Ken and Deuce. The west fire door would have Felicia, Tess, Steven and Clawd, while the east fire door would have Julia, Malcolm, Laura and Draculaura. Patricia, Travis, J.D. and Aaron would wait outside with Klaus and Sunny, while Ghoulia would help provide tech support.

It didn't take long for everyone to get into position and begin sneaking up on the doors, Ghoulia and J.D. having already launched an interference program that would jam any surveillance equipment, while Cleo's idol of Isis neutralized the outside booby traps.

"Anything on the doors would be knocked out when we blow the doors," said Max over everyone's earpiece as they reached the doors and began placing plastic explosives on the hinges and locks.

"It's times like this," said a slightly nervous Leon as he and Max placed their explosives on the front door hinges, "that I really miss

Andrew. He really knew how to blow something up."

"He still does," said Sora, "on the last world my friends and I were on, Andrew and Jill are happily married, with kids of their own."

"What about me?" Katina asked, "am I still a breathing vegetable on that world?"

"I don't remember," said Sora, "But I did see Max, Jill and Leon."

"How'd I look in the other world?" Leon asked, "was he faster than me?"

"I only saw you for a bit in the other world," said Sora, "but I did see a lot of Harry."

"Harry who?" Max asked.

"Oh, right, there aren't any wizards on this world," said Sora, "not like the ones at Hogwarts."

"What's Hogwarts?" Leon asked.

"Long story," said Sora.

"Hmm, you'll have to send me the cliffs notes version," said Cleo.

A short time later all the explosives were in place and wired to a synchronized remote detonator. Max, Jill, Felicia and Julia stood ready with smoke and flash bang grenades, while Leon armed the detonator. Gas masks had been handed out to everyone going in, with the exception of Deuce, whom could hold his breath for several minutes and whose eyes would only be hindered by the mask, while Draculaura didn't need to breathe.

"We go in on three," said Max through everyone's earpiece.

"Kick their asses," said Patricia.

"One..." said Max, "... two... three!"

Leon pressed the trigger on the detonator and the doors blew inward. Max, Jill, Julia and Felicia then tossed in the smoke and flash bang grenades, leading to a massive series of light and sound detonations, followed by the release of tear gas.

"Masks on, now!" shouted Max as everyone donned the protective masks, "let's go!"

With that they went into the building, with Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm with their Keyblades out, the Meta Humans with their weapons drawn, while Deuce was ready to lower his shades and petrify at a second's notice, Clawd ready to rip a witch apart, Cleo ready to curse someone and Draculaura ready to grab one of the Trix.

But as the smoke cleared, it soon dawned upon our heroes and allies that they were the only ones in the warehouse.

"Something's not right," said Max as everyone removed their gas masks.

"Damn right, something's not right," said an irate Ken, "there's no one here!"

"That's impossible!" said Katina, "my visions, they..."

"I knew it," groaned Julia, "we've been on a snipe hunt."

"Looks like someone isn't ready to get back to work after all," said Steven, only to be punched in the face by Jill.

"Screw you, you loudmouth bastard!" snapped Jill, "if Katina had a vision of those witches in here, then..."

"Jill, Violet isn't here," said Max.

"No, but they were here," said Clawd as he sniffed the air, "For just a moment, but they were."

"Check anyway," said Max, "look everywhere, they might have left a clue or something, anything."

Everyone then heard Patricia irately shout on their earpieces, "what in the name of sanity is going on in there!? Why haven't you made any captures? Why hasn't there been a gunshot?"

"I think we've been had, Patricia," said Max.

"The Trix, they must have teleported to a secondary location after arriving here," said Malcolm as the warehouse was searched. "They set up those protective wards and traps in order to fool us."

"That sounds like their thing," said Riku.

"Which means they're smarter than us," said Draculaura in a depressed tone.

"The hell they are!" snapped Jill, "we're just one step behind them, that's all."

"At this rate, they'll be two steps more ahead of us," said Steven, only to shy away from Jill as she raised her fist again.

"They may be clever, but they're not that smart," said Tess, "We fooled them that time at The Wildlands resort, and of course, if they were so smart, they would have anticipated Darkar's treachery."

"Then why do I feel like we're the ones who had the wool pulled over our eyes?" Riku asked.

"Hey! I found something!" said Deuce from the area he was searching. He brought over a small metal disk that had glowing red lights on it.

"It's not a machine," said Ken as he and everyone looked at the disk.

"There's definitely a spell on it," said Malcolm, "but I can't tell what."

"I could be wrong," said Travis over everyone's earpiece, "but Ghoulia is asking if there's any markings on the disk."

"No, just these red lights," said Steven as he looked at the disk, "and... wait, wasn't there more of those lights just a second ago?"

Sora looked and indeed, the lights on the disk were getting fewer. When Duce first brought the disk over, there were about a dozen. Now there were ten.

Just then another light went out, followed by another and another.

"It's like it's counting down," said Cleo as the lights continued to go out.

Just as there were only three lights left, Katina's eyes contracted and she gasped in shock. She then shouted, "IT'S A TRAP!"

At the same time outside, Patricia had the same conclusion. "GET OUT!" she shouted into the com system, "GET OUT OF THERE!"

But then the inside of the warehouse exploded in a blinding and deafening burst of fire, the concussive force of which knocked Patricia, Aaron, Tyler, J.D., Ghoulia, Klaus and Sunny down. When they got up, they saw the warehouse was completely ablaze.

"My god!" exclaimed a horrified Patricia, "they... they never stood a chance."

"Max, Jill, Leon, everyone..." said Travis, while Aaron, J.D., Klaus, Sunny and Ghoulia looked on in appalled silence.

"You rang?" a familiar voice asked.

Patricia, Travis, J.D., Ghoulia, Klaus and Sunny looked behind them and saw Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm, Max, Jill, Leon, Katina, Ken,

Steven, Felicia, Julia, Cleo, Deuce, Clawd and Draculaura, all looking perfectly fine.

"What... how... why... when?" a flabbergasted Patricia asked.

"That leaves just 'where and who,'" said Steven.

"Oh shut up, you lucky bastard!" shouted Tyler as he, Aaron, J.D., Ghoulia, Klaus and Sunny, rushed over.

Ghoulia frantically moaned something that was on the line of 'how did you get out of there?'

"We wouldn't have," said Riku, "if it weren't for Cleo."

"Let this be a lesson to you all," said Cleo as she put a gold idol of Anubis holding a glowing green gem into her purse, "never doubt the power of Egyptian magic."

"Yeah, well, kudos to you," said Ken. "But on the other hand," he then glared at Katina, "thanks for the warning, 'Admiral Ackbar!'"

"This is twice in like five minutes that you fraked up," said Julia, "what gives?"

"I... I don't know," said Katina. She then sat down, a frustrated look on her face, "I don't know. Maybe... maybe I really am not ready."

"Don't you dare say that!" said Jill as she sat down next to Katina, "nothing's wrong with you."

"Then how come I lead us all into a trap?!" Katina asked irately.

"You didn't lead us, we were following the enemy trail," said Max.

"The witches were in the warehouse," said Clawd, "and Violet was with them. And there were about twenty others with them."

"They've got allies?" Malcolm asked.

"Just the three of them Icy, Darcy and Stormy, are a handful," said Riku.

"We don't know for sure that they are working with anyone directly," said Tess. "we don't know anything about these other people."

"They weren't Normies, that's for sure," said Clawd, "or if they were, they really smelled bad, and by bad, I mean horribly wrong with them."

"If you catch that scent again, can you follow it?" Jill asked.

"Clawd can track them to the moon and back if they went that way," said Draculaura.

"And we've got this," said Tess as she held up a broken shard of ceramic, "I found it in a corner and I don't think it belonged in that particular location."

"It might just be the clue we need J.D. as he took the shard from Tess.

"And I found this," said Draculaura as she held out a small handkerchief that had a red stain on it, "there was a bit of... blood... on a piece of scrap metal. But it doesn't smell like real... blood."

"It's blood, alright," said Clawd as he sniffed the handkerchief, "but... it's tainted somehow."

"I'll get it analyzed right away," said J.D. as he took the handkerchief and put it and the ceramic shard into separate evidence bags.

Just then Patricia's cell phone chimed with a received message, "it's from Mark," she said as she read the email, "apparently there was a snag in communications, solar flares interfering with satellites. We were supposed to have gotten a specialist from Washington, an expert on metaphysics and parapsychology, but she's stuck in traffic.

The specialist, Dr. Solaris Pretorius, is on her way from the hotel with Mark and our newest Scanner, Shawn Ohmsford."

"They've cleared Shawn for field duty?" Laura asked, "already? He's only been with The Bureau for four months."

"Well, the higher-ups think he's ready," said Patricia.

"Wish someone else was ready," muttered Steven, only to be punched in the face by Jill, knocking him to the ground.

"God god, Jill!" snapped Leon, "what's the matter with you?!"

"You ought to know, you Cajun cretin!" shouted Jill, "everyone is being horrible to Katina! Yes, she made a few mistakes."

"Mistakes that almost got us killed!" said Felicia.

"Well, you shouldn't treat her like she's a burden to us," said Jill.

"It's alright, Jill," said Katina in a calm yet sad tone, "I know that you're only trying to help me, but I know when to back off. If someone can call me a cab, I'll take the next flight back to Washington."

"Hell no!" snapped Patricia, "you're still on active duty, despite our recent mishaps. You will leave when I say you leave, is that understood, Katina Jones?" she then glared at Steven, Ken, Felicia and Julia, "and you four! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for treating Katina the way you have! She's been saving the world long before you even heard of The Bureau, long before your powers showed up. The least you owe her is respect!"

"I respect her," said Cleo, "she's a living legend."

"Yeah, she took down that lunatic, Sherry Randal, all by herself," said Draculaura.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Oh, right," said Draculaura in a slightly embarrassed tone, "Shannon Revek."

"And we heard a lot about here from the other Bureau guys," said Sora. Riku, Tess and Malcolm nodded in agreement.

"At least some people don't think I'm a total screw up," said Katina.

"You're not a screw up," said Leon.

"The rest of us wouldn't be here if it weren't for you," said Max, "remember that time in Bangkok? That demon would have ripped my head off, and I don't want to know if my head grows back. But you blasted that thing into slime."

"Yeah, that was a pretty sticky situation," said Katina as she smiled.

"Remember when we tracked that windigo in New Mexico?" Jill asked, "that thing was about to eat me, but you ran right in and made its head explode."

"Now that was a sticky situation," laughed Katina.

"Remember that time in Panama?" Leon asked, "when we were after that chameleon assassin?"

"Yeah, that... wait," said Katina, "that wasn't in Panama."

"What are you talking about?" Leon asked, "of course it was Panama."

"No, it was Nicaragua," said Katina.

"It was Panama," Leon insisted.

"Nicaragua," insisted Katina.

"You're both wrong," said Max, "it was Costa Rica."

"I thought it was Honduras," Jill.

"I don't believe this," said an exasperated Patricia, "you can't even remember your won missions. It was Columbia, for Christ's sake!"

"It was?" Leon asked, "oh, yeah, now I remember," while Max, Jill and Katina voiced their agreements.

"And these are the ones who saved the world so many times," said Patricia in a deflated tone.

Her cell phone then chimed with another email. Upon reading it, Patricia's expression brightened, "oh, Sora? Good news; Kairi's been found."

"WHAT?!" exclaimed Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm.

"Apparently she was found yesterday," said Patricia, "a friend of a friend of The Bureau reported her location. But because of the satellite disruptions and the hectic activity going on in Washington and New York, I wasn't informed until now. Anyway, Kairi's safe and as soon as this whole mess is cleaned up, we'll go get her."

"Well, that's a relief," said Sora, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm nodded.

At that Ghoulia moaned something urgent.

"Oh, that's right," said Cleo, "I completely forgot," she then looked at Sora, "your friend Kairi, she has red hair and has this really strange but interesting sword shaped like a key?"

"Keyblade," said Clawd.

"Yes, that," said Cleo.

"That's her alright," said Tess, "but..."

"Kairi's with our friends back home," said Dracualura, "and I forgot all about it too," she then giggled, "silly me."

"Why didn't you tell us you saw Kairi!?" exclaimed Malcolm.

"Dude, you never asked," said Deuce.

"Never mind that," said Sora, "how was she? Is Kairi alright!?"

"She was perfectly fine last we saw her," said Cleo, "she was with Frankie, Lagoona, Abbey, Spectra and a lot more of our friends."

"They were going to the opening of a new nightclub," said Draculaura, "The Crystal Palace, which..." her expression then fell as she realized something terrible, "which was attacked tonight by those drug using lunatics! Oh my ghou!"

"No, I talked with Frankie back at the museum," said Cleo, "she and the others said they were okay, so Kairi is okay too."

"But you said they were going after those Monster-hating psychos," said Clawd.

"I don't believe this," said Sora, "Kairi's chasing after a gang of maniacs high on drugs."

"Why so down?" Malcolm asked, "if I know anything about Kairi, then some koozed up junkie wouldn't stand a chance against her. And if Cleo's friends are as awesome as she and the other Monsters we've met, then they've got those junkies already shut down."

All of a sudden a portal opened up in the air above our heroes and from it emerged Frankie, Clawdeen, Howleen, Abbey, Heath, Lagoona, Gill, Toralei Spectra, Rebecca, Operetta, Venus, Rochelle, Jackson, Chad and Lilith, all of them landing in a heap atop of Steven, while Spectra hovered in midair.

"Great gooey globs of green gumbo!" exclaimed Leon.

"You can say that again," moaned Frankie as she and the others tried to get back up.

"Oh my Ra! Frankie!" shouted Cleo as she, Deuce, Clawd, Draculaura and Ghoulia rushed over to help their friends.

"Hey, Cleo," said Frankie as she was helped up, "you missed one electrifying party."

"And you missed a frightfully posh one as well," said Cleo, "but we both had our evenings ruined, so we're both even, wouldn't you agree?"

"I'm just glad you guys and ghouls are alright," said Clawd as he helped Clawdeen up, while Draculaura helped Howleen up.

"Wish I was alright," said Gill as he and Lagoona helped each other up, "I feel like someone tried to pull all my scales out."

"I feel like I was trapped in a maelstrom," said a dizzy Lagoona.

"Note to self," said Abbey as she and Heath got back up, "no more portal travel, ever."

"You won't get any arguments from me, babe," said Heath.

"I'll stick with normal travel, thank you very much," said Toralei as she stood up on her own.

"What are you doing here, Toralei?" Cleo asked in an accusing tone.

"Trying to stop a gang of drugged-out lunatics and save a Normie," said Toralei, "care to join us?"

"We're in the middle of our own rescue, thank you very much," said Draculaura.

"Maybe we can team up," said Kairi.

"Kairi!" shouted Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm.

At the sound of familiar voices, Kairi turned and saw her friends. For a split second, she smiled brightly at the sight of her friends. But then a dark cloud passed over her eyes and when she blinked, Kairi saw the tentacle monster that had Sora's face, while Riku, Tess and Malcolm were tentacled zombies.

"No," said a terrified Kairi, "no, not again! Get away from me, you horrible things!"

"What in the name of Mother Earth is going on?" Venus asked.

"Don't ask me," said Rebecca as she jiggled free a stuck gear in her arm, "we just got here."

"Kairi, it's us," said Riku as he took a step forward, "your friends."

"Stay back!" shouted Kairi as she backed away, "leave me alone, you murdering abominations!"

"What's gotten into you, Kairi?" Frankie asked.

"Can't you see them!?" Kairi shouted as she pointed an accusing finger at Sora, "that's the thing that killed Sora! And those things!" she pointed at Riku, Tess and Malcolm, "they're ravenous zombies! They want to eat me!"

At that Ghoulia moaned in an offended tone as she put her hands on her hips.

"Kairi, they're not Monsters," said Lagoona, "they're Normies like you."

"Assuming they are Normies," said Heath.

"Oh go light a match," said Operetta, "can't you see that Kairi's got her pickles in a jar?"

"That doesn't make any sense," said Rochelle.

"It does if the jar's warped," said Operetta.

"Oh, now I understand," said Rochelle. She then frowned, "no, I don't."

"It's got to be the venom," said Sora, "that wasp sting, that..."

"Tracker Jacker," said Malcolm.

"Yeah, that," said Sora, "it's still messing with her."

"But J.D....I mean the other J.D.," said Tess, "he said he cured the venom."

"No, it's dark magic!" said Malcolm urgently, "I sense it now, Kairi's cursed!"

"Cursed?" Frankie asked.

"I'm not cursed!" exclaimed Kairi, "they're the cursed ones!" she then summoned her Keyblade, a look of unadulterated hate on her face, "if you things want me, you got me!" she then rushed at Sora, whom barely got his Keyblade out in time to block Kairi. She then launched a furious assault on Sora, mercilessly trying to stab him, with Sora just managing to block her and forced to fall back.

"Now this is what I call a curse," said Toralei as she watched Kairi attack Sora, apparently enjoying herself at the sight of one soul mate turned against the other.

"Oh, go scratch a post," said Draculaura.

"I'll scratch you," said Toralei as she eyed her claws.

"Kairi, it's me!" Sora shouted as he blocked a head strike, keeping to the defensive, not willing to hurt her, "it's Sora!"

But in her addles state, all Kairi heard was the tentacle creature emit incoherent noises from its writhing maw.

"Die, you filthy thing!" shouted Kairi as she tried to stab Sora in the heart, "die!"

"Why the hell are we standing around watching?" Jill asked irately as she drew her cutlass. She jumped in, just as Sora overbalanced on a block and was knocked down. Jill got in front of Sora and blocked Kairi just as she was about to deliver a killing blow. "Curse or no curse, I won't let you kill him!"

"Get out of my way!" snapped Kairi as she struck at Jill, whom blocked the strike "that thing killed Sora!"

"That is Sora, you bloomin' idiot!" said Jill as she went on the offensive, forcing Kairi back.

"This Jill isn't as nice as the other one," said Malcolm.

"This Jill doesn't have Andrew," said Tess.

"Just calm down, Kairi," said Riku in a placating tone as he helped Sora back up, "we're not going to hurt you."

"You'll get yours, you filthy zombie!" snapped Kairi as she blocked Jill.

At that Ghoulia moaned again in an insulted tone.

"She doesn't know what she's saying, Ghoulia," remarked Clawdeen.

"If you don't calm down, I'll make you stop!" shouted Jill as she increased the speed and force of her attacks, forcing Kairi back more and more as she barely managed to keep up.

"If you're with that horrible thing then you're my enemy!" shouted Kairi as she went on the offensive again, now attacking Jill with equal fury, forcing Jill back a few paces.

"That must have been one heck of a curse," said Clawd.

"What can we do?" Draculaura asked.

"Don't just stand there!" exclaimed Kairi, "help me!"

"Help you fight our friend and ally?" Cleo asked, "I think not."

"Then you're all my enemies!" shouted Kairi, "I'll destroy you all!"

"She's gonna end up burning herself out at this rate," said Aaron, "emotional, physical and psychological overload."

"There's got to be something we can do," said Sora.

"I can do something," said Laura, "but we've got to get her to hold still first." She then sent a psychic pulse at Kairi, intending to knock Kairi off balance just enough for our heroes to grab her, but Kairi shrugged it off and kept fighting Jill.

"That's not right," said Laura, "she shouldn't have been able to endure that. Wait, let me try something else." She then focused her power to completely restrain Kairi, but again, Kairi shrugged it off, now forcing Jill onto the defensive.

"I don't believe this," said a stunned Laura, "my power, it doesn't affect her."

"We'll worry about that later," said Max, "we've got to get her to stop somehow."

"Frankie, you can tase her!" said Chad.

"Yeah, tase her!" said Jackson.

"If psionics won't work," said Lilith, "then an electric shock would definitely slow her down."

"It would," said Frankie hesitantly, "but... I don't want to hurt her."

"She's gonna hurt a lot of people if we don't stop her," said Riku.

"Do it, Frankie, zap her!" shouted Heath.

"Alright," said Frankie, her face with reluctant determination, "but I just want to say that it's a bad idea. Kairi! I'm really sorry about this!" she then aimed her left index finger at Kairi. Frankie's neck bolts sparked as a surge of electricity went up her arm, out her finger and hit Kairi. She was blasted off her feet and fell to the ground, twitching slightly, then went still with a sigh.

"Oh my ghoul!" exclaimed a horrified Frankie, "I killed her!"

"No, she's just unconscious," said Aaron after examining Kairi, "electroshock weapons disrupts muscle function and throws your electrolytes out of whack. She'll come around in a few minutes, groggy and lethargic but otherwise unharmed."

"She's still under that curse," said Malcolm, "and I don't know what to do for her. This stinks of Maleficent."

"Maleficent?" Sora asked, "you think she did this?"

"Well, who else do we know who hates our guts and knows dark magic?" Malcolm asked.

"Well, we can't just leave her like this," said Leon, "she'll wake up and either be to afraid of everyone to do anything or try to kill us."

"She nearly did me in," said Jill as she held up her cutlass, which was severely chipped and cracked, "those Keyblades are right vicious."

"If Aiden were here he'd fix it," said Sora.

"I'll have a new sword brought over," said Patricia to Jill. She then looked at Kairi, "now, what to do about her?"

"Mind if I answer that?" a female voice asked. There standing off to the side was a woman in her mid 30's with waist length auburn hair tied back in a ponytail, dark brown eyes behind glasses and wore a white lab coat over an orange blouse, a tan skirt and black shoes.

With her was Mark and a newcomer, a boy about 15 years. He was of medium height with short black hair, light blue eyes and wore a green shirt, blue jeans and boots along with the tan Bureau jacket.

"Dr. Pretorius," said Patricia, "you made good time."

"I would have been here sooner if it weren't for those flaming solar flares," said the woman, Dr. Solaris Pretorius, "from what I head over the com channel, Deputy Director Walker, is that you, The Ramblers, our visitors from another world and our Monster allies are in quite the jam."

"It's my fault, Dr. Pretorius," said Katina, "well, not all of it, but if I hadn't so foolishly followed what was clearly a misleading vision, then..."

"My dear Ms. Jones," said Pretorius, "there's nothing wrong with your powers. I examined you last week and the only thing that was holding you back was your own self doubts and inhibitions. Trust me, your powers are in perfect working condition." She then took out from her coat pocket a bag full of dried fruit and vegetables and ate some.

She then looked at Jill, "it's nice to see that you're back in action, Ms. Sparrow. You have my most sincere condolences for your adopted daughter."

"Violet isn't dead yet," said Jill, "now, are you going to help us take down these disgusting witches? Or are you going to talk all night?"

"She has less than a day to keep her word and kill the Trix," said Julia.

"I'm sure she'll keep her word," said Pretorius after eating some more of her dried fruit and vegetables, "but I have a few more words to say," she then looked at Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm, "you four are quite the troublemakers, or rather, trouble always follows you."

"Keyblade Wielding and trouble go hand in hand," said Sora, "wait, why am I talking like that? Can you help Kairi?"

"I'll examine her in a moment," said Pretorius. She then looked at Cleo and the other Monsters, "it's also good that our two cultures are finally working more closely. Hopefully, once this current crisis is absolved, relations between humans and Monsters will be much closer," she then looked at Frankie, "well, I'm glad that you're coming along quite nicely."

"Do... do I know you?" Frankie asked hesitantly, "I feel like we've met before."

"We should know each other," said Pretorius as she smiled warmly, "I helped bring you to life."

"No way!" said Lagoona, while Gill, Clawdeen and the others looked shocked.

"It's true," said Pretorius, "I helped Frankie's father, Frank N. Stein, create her. I was in the room when you first opened your eyes upon the world. I would have helped you better understand the world you had come into but I was called away on an urgent matter. But I'm happy to say that you're doing quite well."

"Does this make you Frankie's godmother or something?" Draculaura asked.

"In a way, yes," said Pretorius, "and call me Solaris."

"I have a godmother," said Frankie as she smiled brightly, "voltagious!" with that her neck bolts sparked.

"Yes, we're all happy that you've got a godmother," said Tess, "but what about Kairi? As soon as she wakes up, she'll freak out again."

"I'll be the judge of that," said Solaris. She then bent down and examined Kairi, "you believe she's cursed?"

"I *know* she's cursed," said Malcolm.

"Well, until we know the exact nature of the curse," said Solaris, "young Kairi will remain plagued by false memories and will continue to see her friends and loved ones as enemies, enemies that she will either fear and run away from, or hate and try to destroy."

"I'm gonna kill Maleficent!" snapped Tess, "She has to be the one who cursed Kairi! I know it! I'm gonna take my razor and skin her down to her bones! I don't care if she is possessing my friend Penny Dubois! I'll slice her open and rip out Maleficent's twisted soul and send it to hell where it belongs!"

"That's a bold statement," said Clawd.

"Damn right it is," said Kairi.

"That still won't help Kairi," said Solaris, "if my understanding of dark magic is correct, this curse is unique. Only the castor knows its exact composition, and therefore how to undo it. But do not despair. With time and reasoning, the counter curse can be deduced. In the meantime, I suggest that the false memories be suppressed so that Kairi can interact with her friends and allies without wanting to either run away or attack."

"Are you talking about temporary amnesia?" Riku asked.

"Specifically the memories concerning her loved ones," said Solaris, "for now, Kairi must forget that she ever knew you. Let me explain; I believe that the curse has infected her memories of her loved ones right down to her heart. Until we break the curse, these infected

memories will continue to poison her sense of judgment and reason."

"Couldn't we just remove the infected memories?" Malcolm asked, "back at Hogwarts, we had other memories removed via magic. I think I can do the same."

"Are you sure you can pull the infected memories out without damaging the rest of her mind?" Solaris asked, "how can you be sure that you won't do more harm than help?"

"I... I don't know," said Malcolm.

"Which is why we must suppress the memories now," said Solaris after eating more of her dried fruit and vegetables, "now, before her senses are further addled. I'm sorry if this upsets you, but for the time being, Kairi must forget her loved ones, specifically her fellow Keyblade Wielders, for they are the trigger that set off the curse."

"How can you know all of this?" Sora asked.

At that Solaris frowned, "oh, I'm sorry, I thought I was the expert here. Did you also go to eleven years of college? Where did you get your doctorates in metaphysics and parapsychology?" she then glanced at Frankie, "by the way, I also have a doctorate in biochemistry and I'm studying mycology."

"What's that?" Frankie asked.

"Mushrooms," said Jackson, "she's studying mushrooms."

"A highly underrated life form," said Solaris as she ate some more of her dried fruit and vegetables.

"I've read about mushrooms," said Klaus, "I can probably identify every poisonous and non-poisonous species on the planet."

"Oh, I'm sure there's a few species that you haven't read about," said Solaris.

"But what about Kairi?" Sora asked.

"A simple memory suppression device will suffice," said Solaris, "which I can have hyper-expressed delivered within minutes, along with a new saber for Jill."

"I always preferred the saber to the cutlass," said Jill.

"Then I'll make the call," said Solaris as she pulled out her cell phone. She then looked at Patricia, "assuming I have the go ahead from our esteemed Deputy Director."

"Sora," said Patricia, "Dr. Pretorius won't act unless I give my approval, which I won't give unless I have your approval."

"What are you waiting for, Sora?" Tess asked, "say yes!"

"Wait a second," said Malcolm, "we don't know anything about this memory suppression device. I mean, I believe that magic and science can work together, but I'd like to know more about the technology first before using it."

"There's no time for you to study up on the thing," said Tess, "if Dr. Pretorius says she can help Kairi, then let her."

"I'd still like to try removing the infected memories myself," said Malcolm, "I might be able to break the curse then."

"You could also mess up Kairi's mind more," said Tess, "we don't have time for this! Kairi's gonna wake up and go crazy again!"

"Which is why I should act now!" said Malcolm. He then looked at Sora, "let me try!"

"Let the experienced scientist try!" said Tess to Sora.

"Sora!" exclaimed Malcolm.

"Sora!" exclaimed Tess.

"Riku, say something," said Sora in a nervous tone, "what do I do?"

"Don't lay this on my shoulders," said Riku, "Kairi's my friend too. You've got to choose yourself, Sora."

"But how do I choose?" Sora asked, "both ideas sound good to me."

"Well," said Riku in a thoughtful tone, "personally I think we should try Pretorius's idea, but..."

"Then we'll do that," said Sora. He then looked at Patricia, "okay."

"Do it," said Patricia to Solaris, whom then made the call.

A few minutes later a BPRD van arrived. Two agents walked up, one carrying a long, thin case and handed it to Jill. She opened it, revealing a brand new, freshly sharpened saber.

The other agent had a smaller case and handed it to Solaris. She opened it, revealing a small metal device with multiple blinking lights.

"It's linked to my phone," said Solaris as she placed the device on Kairi's forehead, "it's adhesive so it won't fall off," she then activated a feature on her phone, "I'm now programming the device to seek out the desired memories and suppress them. When Kairi wakes up, she'll see Sora and the other Keyblade Wielders as just that, fellow Keyblade Wielders."

"How are you going to going to explain the big metal thing on her forehead with the big blinking lights?" Clawdeen asked.

"That I believe will be up to those she trusts," said Solaris, "specifically the first friends she made when she first arrived on this world, namely, Ms. Stein and her fellow Monsters."

"You want us to lie to her?" Frankie asked, "I hate lying!"

"Well, I'm afraid you will have to fib," said Solaris, "you've got to convince her everything is alright, to keep her calm and not to

question reality too much. The device isn't perfect. If Kairi suffers prolonged emotional strain then the suppression will fail and she'll resort back to her fears and hate. Or worse, she will suspect that her memories are being suppressed and bring them back on her own, which would make her resurging hate and fears much worse. It'll take far too long to explain, but it's the truth."

"You'll have to figure your story soon," said Aaron as he examined Kairi, "she's coming around." Indeed, Kairi was stirring, as if waking up from a deep, deep sleep.

"Sora, I suggest you and your fellow Keyblade Wielders get out of sight for now," said Solaris, "she won't know who you are when she sees you, so it would be best that Frankie introduces you, or perhaps she should introduce our esteemed Deputy Director and she in turns introduces you."

"Make it snappy!" said Aaron urgently, "she'll be fully conscious in a few seconds."

"Sora, I..." said Riku, "I think..."

"Let's just go," said Sora in a forced tone, barely able to hide the pain in his heart. He, Riku, Tess and Malcolm then walked out of sight of Kairi, waiting to be introduced, and hoping that this masquerade wouldn't last for long.

"What do I do now?" Frankie asked.

"Just act natural," said Solaris, "so long as you keep her in the dark."

"Right, no pressure," said Frankie. At that moment, Kairi's eyes opened.

"Uhh... oh... oww!" said Kairi, "what...?"

"Kairi!" said Frankie as she rushed over to her and knelt down, "thank goodness you're alright."

"Frankie?" Kairi asked in a groggy tone, "what... what happened?"

"You... hit your head when we fell out of the portal," said Frankie, hastily making things up, "somehow, you landed first and everyone landed on top of you."

"Uh... yeah," said Heath, getting into the act as he nervously scratched the back of his head, "sorry about that."

"You have my most humbly apologizes," said Abbey.

"Sorry, love," said Abbey, "didn't mean to dogfish pile you."

"Remind me to recalibrate my gyroscopes before portal jumping," said Rebecca.

"You're going to be alright, Kairi," said Frankie as she helped Kairi sit up.

"I hope so," said Kairi. She then looked around, "wait, where's Clair? Did we find Lucas and his gang of junkies?"

"Not yet," said Howleen as she sniffed the air, "but if I ignore everyone's scent, and the smell of burning warehouse, I can tell that those Monster-haters were here with Clair, as well as three other... evil... scents, and one more good scent."

Kairi then felt her forehead, feeling the device, "what the hell is this?"

"Don't touch it," said Frankie, "you had a concussion and it's healing you."

"A concussion?" Kairi asked.

"Solaris and Aaron said you need to keep it on for a while," said Lagoona.

"Solaris?" Kairi asked, "wait, Aaron? Aaron Spartan? He's here?"

"You've met my counterpart," said Aaron.

"We found and teamed up with The Bureau while you were off jumping the moon," said Clawdeen.

"And my godmother," said Frankie. With that she introduced Kairi to Solaris, Aaron, Max, Jill, Katina and the others, saving Patricia for last.

"Patricia Walker, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense," said Patricia, "at your service."

"Nice to meet you," said Kairi as she shook Patricia's hand. Kairi then saw Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, but the suppression device made them seem as total strangers. "Who are they? More Bureau agents?"

"More like allies, like Frankie and her fellow Monsters," said Patricia, "and Keyblade Wielders no less."

"Keyblade Wielders?" Kairi asked, "I thought... wait, of course there's more. Different universes and Wibbly-Wobbly Timey-Wimey."

"We've heard that a lot on our travels," said Riku. He then walked over, "I'm Rick," he then indicated Tess, "this is my girlfriend, Tammy," he then indicated Sora, "my best friend Sam," and then Malcolm, "and this is our friend Mitch."

"Nice to meet you," said Kairi as she shook their hands in turn, "now, what's this about other people being with that lunatic Lucas?"

"We're... tracking a trio of dark witches," said Tess, "alternate versions of The Trix."

"I thought they were in Omega by now," said Kairi irately, "well, if we sent one version of Icy, Darcy and Stormy into a frozen prison, then we can do the same with another."

"I thought we were going to hang and scalp them," said Malcolm.

"Or at least cut their heads off," said Tess.

"Oh, we'll do more than that when we catch them," said Jill as she tested out her new saber with a series of sword movements, "they took Violet and The Necronomicon. The later is unforgivable enough! But what I'll do to them for taking Violet, the hell they'll wind up in is going to seem like heaven after what I do to them," she then looked at Max and Leon, "after we catch them of course, then they're mine."

"We'll come to a final decision to their punishment after we get the book back," said Max.

"Which is where I come in," said the other newcomer, Shawn Ohmsford, "if the dark witches and the junkie psychos are working together, then I'll find them."

"You sure you're up to it?" Laura asked, "you've only been with The Bureau for a few months now."

"I can do this, Laura," said Shawn, "I know I can do it."

"Young Ohmsford here is the most promising Tracker in the history of The Bureau," said Solaris, "if it moves, breathes and thinks, he can find it."

"I just need something of Violet and Clair," said Shawn, "then I'll be able to home in on them."

"Will this do?" Jill asked as she took out a long purple ribbon from her pocket.

"That's Violet's usual hair ribbon," said Klaus as he took the ribbon and handed it to Shawn, "she wore a different one for the gala tonight."

"And this is Clair's good luck charm," said Jackson as he took out a small bracelet out of his pocket, one that had black and gold skull

charms on woven silver chain, "she let me hold it before we went to the club."

"They're both perfect," said Shawn as Jackson handed the bracelet to him.

"He'll find them before too long," said Solaris.

Malcolm then spoke to Sora, Riku and Tess in a hushed tone, focusing on Riku first, "Mitch? You picked Mitch as my fake name?"

"It was that or Mark," said Riku, "and there's already a Mark here. I'm sorry but it was the best I could come up with on such short notice."

"Remind me to never let you plan our aliases again," said Tess. She then sighed in an exasperated tone, "this isn't going to work. There's no way we can keep our stories straight. Kairi is going to figure out the truth and all hell is going to break loose."

"We can't think like that," said Sora, "we've got to give Solaris the time to figure out how to break the curse."

"I can do that myself," said Malcolm, "why does she have to do it? I don't care if she did go to college and has all those fancy degrees. I'm telling you guys, there's something funny about that Dr. Pretorius."

"She does seem too good to be true," said Tess.

"We can't just automatically assume the worst," said Riku, "even after all we've been through."

"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you," said Tess.

"We should at least keep an eye on her," said Malcolm, "I've had hunches that turned out wrong, but this is one that I'm sure is right. Pretorius is hiding something."

"Maybe she's got a really embarrassing secret," said Sora, "but we've been through too much to ignore a hunch. Yeah, we should keep an eye on her."

Just then Patricia received another email, "well slap my fanny and call me stupid," she said, "those forensic lab boys and girls work fast."

"They analyzed the evidence?" Clawd asked.

"They're still working on that blood sample," said Patricia, "but that ceramic shard came from a specific glass and ceramic store; The End of History, located at 548 Hudson Street."

"Greenwich Village," said Steven.

"We can be there in ten minutes if we take East Houston Street," said Felicia as she got directions on her phone.

"Well, what do we do when we get there?" Venus asked.

"If either Violet or Clair are anywhere near that place," said Clawd, "Clawdeen, Howleen and I can sniff them out."

"Then we've got a plan," said Patricia, "let's get going, people, I want this mess wrapped but before dawn!"

"Indeed it shall," said Solaris as she ate more of her dried fruit and vegetables. She then looked at Sora, Frankie and the other Keyblade Wielders and Monsters, "oh, I'm sorry, I should have offered you some. Care for a snack?" She held out her bag of dried fruit and vegetables.

Sora and Frankie then saw Patricia furiously shake her head, as if warning them not to accept Solaris' offer.

"Uh, I'll pass," said Sora hesitantly.

"Yeah, I'm not really hungry," said Frankie.

"Well, I am," said Cleo as she walked over and took a big handful of dried fruits and vegetables, "I haven't eaten since the gala, and you can only fill up so much on hors d'oeuvres."

"I wouldn't do that!" Draculaura said hastily, "I smelled wasabi!"

"I smell it too," said Clawdeen, while Clawd and Howleen nodded.

"Oh, please," said a disapproving Cleo, "I'm not afraid of a little wasabi," she then ate the dried fruit and vegetables, only to have her face flush and she clutched her throat as the spicy taste of Japanese horseradish took effect. She then gasped, "Water! Water!"

Steven, laughing like it was the funniest thing in the world, handed a water bottle to Deuce, whom handed it to Cleo, whom drank it dry within seconds, sighing with relief afterwards.

Cleo then glared irately at Draculaura, Clawd, Clawdeen and Howleen, "Why didn't you warn me?!"

"We did warn you about the wasabi," said Draculaura.

"But you didn't give us a chance to say how much there was," said Howleen.

"What gives?" Sora asked Solaris.

"How come you're not gagging on all that wasabi?" Frankie asked.

"I'm immune, I guess," said Solaris as she ate more wasabi-coated dried fruit and vegetables, "they're my one vice, I can't get enough of them."

"Let's just get going before something else happens," said Malcolm. Everyone agreed with that.

... Hogwarts...

"Now that we can hear them," said Max, after J.D. adjusted the viewing device, "I'm not surprised that those dark witches and those junkies are holed up in Greenwich Village, it's a haven for the dark forces."

"How would you know that?" Draco asked.

"London has Knockturn Alley alongside Diagon Alley," said Harry, "I'm not surprised that New York City has an entire neighborhood dedicated to the dark arts."

"Oh, don't get me wrong," said Max, "Greenwich Village is a very nice neighborhood."

"A lot of artists and beatniks in The Village," said Aaron, "but it's underground that you've got to worry about."

"And after dark," said Jill, "that's when all the creepy things come out."

Just then Andrew came in with Roxas and Naminé, "you want to swap stories about The Village? The things I could tell you all about what goes on there after midnight, I'll curl your nose hairs."

"I'll pass, thank you very much," said Draco.

"How's it going with Aiden and Ashley?" J.D. asked.

"They're over halfway done making the pieces for the portal projector," said Naminé, "I've never seen Aiden do so much Alchemy in one session."

"He can't keep this up," said Roxas, "he's got to run out of energy soon. You know what? I think he's cheating somehow."

"Cheating?" Hermione asked, "how so?"

"He's been going non stop, transmuting all that sand into parts for the machine," said Roxas. He then looked at Naminé, "you

remember how Aiden used to go on and on about Equivalent Exchange, right?"

"As if I'll ever forget," said Naminé, "'The First Law of Equivalent Exchange: To Obtain, Something Of Equal Value Must Be Lost.'"

"Alchemy needs both raw materials and energy to transmute into something else," said Roxas, "and Aiden's been burning energy there's no tomorrow. He's got to be cheating Equivalent Exchange somehow."

"Or maybe he's receiving a different kind of help," said Naminé, "but what?"

Just then Slughorn walked in, "I believe I can answer that," he said, "during this crisis, I continued work on Malcolm's brilliant work. His formula for an enhanced restorative draft was too important to lay incomplete while he was away, so I finished it for him."

"I don't suppose you're going to try and take credit for Malcolm's hard work, Professor?" Jill asked.

"Mrs. Carpenter!" exclaimed Slughorn, "do you honestly believe that I am capable of such vile plagiarism?!"

"Well, you do have a habit of riding the coattails of rising stars," said Jill.

"So, you finished Malcolm's potion?" Roxas asked, sensing the need to change the subject before an argument broke out.

"Finished, tested and administer to young Aiden Mackenzie," said Slughorn, "the concoction works perfectly, fully restoring him in mind and body. He's perfectly able to finish the remaining parts of the machine, as well as fight a lengthy battle afterwards."

"And I was just about to whip up a batch of my energy muffins," said Andrew.

Just then Tara stomped into the room, a look of unadulterated anger on her face, "unbelievable!" she snapped, "utterly unbelievable!"

"What's unbelievable?" Harry asked.

"No one wants to come with me," said Tara as she slumped into a chair, "none of my fellow 7th Years want to go to the other world and help Sora, Kairi and the others."

"What?" Hermione asked, "that can't be right. Surely there must be someone in the school who wants to go with you."

"Oh, there's plenty of volunteers," said Tara, "Cass, Yasmine, Nathaniel, Lancaster, Ryo, Cordelia, even James, Albus, Rose, Izzy and Socrpio. But no one of age volunteered."

"That's impossible!" said Ginny, "no 7th Year from Gryffindor?"

"No, not one," said Tara, "and no one from Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw either."

"I guess that means courage isn't all that it's cracked up to be," said Draco.

"Don't you start on this, Malfoy!" spat Ginny, "I didn't hear any Slytherins volunteering either," she then looked at Tara, "did any Slytherin 7th Years volunteer?"

"Nope," said Tara, "it looks like I'm the only one going with Roxas, Naminé and Aiden."

"The hell you are," said Jill in a determined tone and she stood up, "I'm going down to the village to get a clear cell reception. There's got to be someone at The Bureau that can be spared for you." With that she ran out of the room.

"What about all those agents and Metas that came to Hogsmeade earlier?" Ron asked.

"They've all been recalled back to Washington," said Aaron, "while Jill, Andrew, Max, Leon, J.D. and Ashley have been instructed to stay put and monitor the situation on the other world. Which doesn't really make much sense to me, I mean, how can we help if we can't go?"

"There are times when I wish I can say screw the rules," said Max.

"I still can't believe that no 7th Year Gryffindors volunteered," said an irate Ginny, "Godric himself must be spinning in his grave!"

"Helga and Rowena must be pretty upset too," said Harry, "and I'll bet even Salazar isn't too happy." He then looked at Draco, "what? No comment?"

"There's none needed," said Draco.

Just then Hermione frowned, "I think we should keep a closer eye on our children. Knowing them, they'll try to go with Tara, permission or no permission, danger or no danger."

"Well, considering where they got their blood from, that's not surprising," said Draco.

"My sons and niece aren't the only ones who've been getting into trouble," said Harry, "Scorpio and Albus are pretty much joined at the hip."

"And don't forget Izzy," said Tara, "she's in this as much as the others."

Just then Jill ran back inside, breathing heavily from her exertions, "I got... an email... the moment I... was outside the... castle," she panted.

"You were only gone a minute," said an impressed Hermione, while Andrew, Ron, Harry and Draco checked their watches.

"Have you been holding out on us all these years?" Max asked in a suspicious tone, "you have super speed?"

"No I... took a... secret passage," said Jill. Andrew then handed her a glass of water, which she downed in a matter of seconds, "much better. Anyway, headquarters knows that we're planning to send Roxas, Naminé, Aiden and Tara, so they're sending two more operatives here."

"Who's available?" Max asked.

"Jana Bachman and Hezekiah Hoffman," said Jill.

"Jana, she's Travis' niece," said Andrew, "and Hezekiah is Warren's second cousin, or is he a third cousin?"

"Second," said Jill, "both are still relatively new to The Bureau but are ready for an extended field mission. They both come highly recommended. Our liaison in the American Magic Administration is preparing a special Portkey that'll bring them to Hogsmeade in an hour."

"Wait, stop for a moment!" said Ginny, "Muggles can't use Portkeys."

"And they can't apparate or use Floo Powder," said Ron, "everyone knows that."

"But everyone knows that magic and Muggle science can't cooperate," said Draco, "but we all saw what it can do just the other day."

"If the AMA says they can make a Muggle-friendly Portkey, then they can," said Hermione, "I just hope it works."

"The last thing we need is for the two new guys to Splinch themselves," said Harry, "I hope they're insured."

... Castle Oblivion...

"Well, it's about time," said Dio Brando as the Interocitor located Sora, Riku, Tess, Malcolm and Kairi, the five of them getting into Bureau vans along with the rest of the agents and the Monsters.

"I must admit," said Sephiroth, "Sora and his companions have found themselves in a rather... unusual situation."

"Those mutant freaks!" snapped Gaston, glaring at the images of Max, Leon and Jill, "I'll rip them all apart!"

"I'm more concerned about those... creatures," said Lady Tremaine as she focused on Frankie and the other Monsters, "what is their story?"

"And would you look at that," said Regina, focusing on Kairi, "I don't see her afraid of Sora or the others. In fact, she's being down right civil to them."

"Too civil if you ask me," said Lady Tremaine, "one would think that two young individuals with so much affection for each other would be clinging to each other like flypaper after being separated in such a traumatic manner."

"It's as if she doesn't know Sora and the others," said Dio Brando, "like they're total strangers to her."

"They must have deduced the curse and are suppressing it," said Maleficent, "while suppressing Kairi's memories of her loved ones."

"You mean she forgot all about Sora?" Dio Brando asked. He then laughed viciously, "how's that for suffering?"

"The strain on his heart must be excruciating," said Insano, "and I can only imagine how painful it is for the other brats."

"It's not enough," said Xehanort irately, "not nearly enough! I want Sora's heart to be in so much anguish that he'll rip it out if only to free himself of the pain!"

"As do I," said Maleficent, "but first, I wish to know more of the current situation, so we can exploit it."

"Easily done," said Xehanort. He then made a few adjustments to the Interocitor and within minutes, the villains knew about The Trix, Lucas and his gang, the abductions of Violet and Clair and the Necronomicon.

"Those witches again!" said an outraged Maleficent, "those irresponsible, outrageous, disgraceful excuses for practitioners of the dark arts! How I loath them and their youthful looks, their cruel beauty and their delusional believes in their own false superiority!"

"If you hate them so much," said Dio Brando, "why not destroy them yourself?"

"If I had half a mind to do so I would," said Maleficent. She then glared at Xehanort, "but I know how much you would enjoy having them to do with as you please."

"How did you...?" Xehanort asked, "no, I do not wish to know how you know. But yes, I would enjoy their company for a time. I may be old, but I still desire the pleasures of the flesh."

"All of a sudden, I almost feel sorry for those girls," said Gaston as he eyed The Trix, "almost."

"I should do it," said Maleficent, "I should take those wretched witches and throw them to Xehanort's mercy. I should also take The Necronomicon. It has been some time since I have had a chance to study an intact copy," she then raised her hand to summon a Dark Corridor, but hesitated, "then again, it would deny us the pleasure of seeing Sora and his companions overcome this latest challenge."

"You're routing for them?" Dio Brando asked in an astonished tone.

"Far from it," said Maleficent, "I merely wish to see which side would destroy the other first."

"Then you'll move in and destroy the victor before they recover from their efforts," said Sephiroth, "brilliant."

"Indeed," said Xehanort, "then we shall watch and wait for the right moment to strike," he then looked at Dio Brando, Lady Tremaine, Gaston, Regina and Insano, "unless one or more of you have objections."

"None from this peanut gallery," said Dio Brando.

"I have no qualm against waiting," said Lady Tremaine.

"Just so long as I get to destroy something in the end," said Gaston.

"I wish to see these witches in action," said Regina, "as well as see what these creatures, these Monsters, can do."

"I am curious as to their powers and abilities," said Insano, "oh the diabolical experiments I have in mind! What contributions to dark science I will achieve with them! Demonic Nobel Prize, here I come!" with that he laughed like the maniac he was.

The end of chapter 6.

Next chapter finds our heroes and allies taking the fight to the enemy, while one will be revealed as a traitor. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Clash and Betrayal

Last time found Sora and his group outside the warehouse where Katina's vision revealed where The Trix had taken Violet and The Necronomicon. But the warehouse turned out to be a trap that our heroes and allies barely avoided. Just then a portal opened up, spilling Kairi, Frankie and their group. Kairi freaked out when she saw Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, but Frankie stunned her before Kairi could hurt anyone. At that moment, help arrived from The Bureau in the form of Dr. Solaris Pretorius, whom used a memory suppression device on Kairi that allowed her to see Sora and the others without being terrified. Katina's visions then found the real location of where The Trix, and The Monsters Haters, were. With both groups united, our combined heroes and allies set out to rescue Clair and Violet and recover The Necronomicon. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 7: Clash and Betrayal

"So you really can make a gadget out of anything?" Clair asked Violet.

"They say that necessity is the mother of all invention," said Violet as she continued to hold on to The Necronomicon, while the two of them were still trapped in the energy cages, suspended above the floor of the abandoned warehouse. Off to one side was Icy, Darcy and Stormy, sitting in summoned chairs and drinking tea, while Lucas and his drug addicted thugs were working out on the other side of the warehouse.

"Give me the right motivation and the right amount of random objects," said Violet, "and I can invent exactly what you need to get out of that sticky situation. God knows I've done it enough with my brother and sister."

"Well, I don't have anything in my pockets," said Clair, "just my wallet, and I don't think you can use a credit card to get us out of these cages," she then tapped the energy bars, which didn't hurt her but remained unyielding.

"My dress doesn't even have pockets," said Violet, "and I doubt Sunny's knack for biting or Klaus' photographic memory can help," she then looked at the book, "but those jerks down there can't do anything to us as long as I have this."

"Which the bastards down there will do anything to get," said Clair, "I may not know much about the dark arts, but I know enough to know that we can't let them summon Yog-Sothoth. The idiots down there think they'll get their hearts desires, assuming the bastards have hearts. But they'll only hasten the end of the world."

"Then it's a good thing I've got a strong grip," said Violet, "good thing too, otherwise I wouldn't be able to handle most of the tools I've used in my inventing."

"What made you want to be an inventor?" Clair asked.

"I wanted to be one as long as I could remember," said Violet, "one of my first memories was from when I was 2. My mother and father were at a museum to dedicate a new exhibit hall. We were looking around the rest of the museum before the ceremony, when I saw a working replica of one of the most important inventions of the modern era; the Tesla Coil. Without the Tesla Coil, we wouldn't have radio or television, electronics as we know it wouldn't even exist."

"Must have made an electrifying impression on you," said Clair.

Violet laughed at the pun, "you could say that the light bulb lit over my head. As soon as I learned how to read, I poured myself into the works of Nikolai Tesla, Thomas Edison and other famous inventors. I entered and won my first inventing contest when I was five, with an automatic rolling pin no less. By age ten, I had filed patents for over a

dozen gadgets and schematics, including an improved electrical pencil sharpener."

"How can you improve the electric pencil sharpener?" Clair asked.

"My design was only a fraction as noisy," said Violet, "all the money my patens earned is going into my inheritance. Did you know that when I turn eighteen, I'll be worth over four hundred million dollars?"

"No wonder that son of a bitch Olaf wants you dead," said an impressed Clair.

"You know about Olaf?" a surprised Violet asked.

"Who doesn't know about that overacting fop?" Clair asked. "He's the most wanted and hated man in America. All those terrorists and criminals you see on posters in the post office, they've all been shoved aside to make room for Olaf. And no wonder; extortion, kidnapping, arson, larceny, multiple counts of fraud and identify theft, murder, statutory rape of a minor."

"*Attempted* statutory rape," said Violet in a correcting manner, "I avoided marrying Olaf by using a different hand to sign the marriage certificate."

"If you and your siblings have outwitted him so much," said Clair, "how come he always got away with his crimes? Why didn't you just grab a knife or a gun? Why didn't you kill the son of a bitch? He killed your mother and father, for Christ's sake!"

At that Violet's expression darkened, as if she was contemplating her worst memories and a dark desire, "I... I never actually thought about killing Olaf. I was so focused on making sure Klaus, Sunny and myself managed to stay alive and safe, no thanks to the adults who tried to help us. Don't get me wrong. All our legal guardians tried their best to take care of us, but they really didn't know what they were doing."

"It's strange," said Clair, "how most idiots in the world are adults over 30. Never trust anyone that age until you get that age, that's what my grandpa always said. Of course, he was 69 when he said it, but hey, he was my grandpa."

"I barely remember my grandparents," said Violet, "they were good people, so were my mother and father. But so is Jill and the others at The Bureau. And so are Cleo, her friends, and Sora and his friends."

"Well, I can't truly vouch for Cleo," said Clair, "but if she's motivated enough, not even a 90% off sale can stop her from doing what's right."

"I'd drink to that if I had something stronger," said Violet, indicating a small jug of water in her cage, and an identical one in Clair's. "But enough about me, what about you? How'd you get involved in this mess?"

"I went to a club party and got involved in a fight with a gang of drugged-out racists," said Clair, "and I never got one of those 'and all I got was this lousy t-shirt' t-shirts." At that she and Violet laughed.

"Well, what else about me?" Clair asked, "let's see. Unlike most girls my age, I'm not obsessed with fashion, I prefer sensible clothes to outrageously priced outfits that I'll only wear a few times, then throw them away when the next big trend hits. I like books and music, and while I'm no inventor, I like to read about the latest technology. Of course, I also read about the supernatural, though not as much as I'd like to. I believe that people are capable of good and evil in equal terms, that only a rare few of humanity are really, truly bad." She then glared down at the Monster-Haters and The Trix, "those lunatics down there, they're the really, truly bad."

"I don't think those witches are from this world," said Violet.

"Is it that obvious?" Clair asked, "so, any ideas on how we're going to get out of here? 'Cause I really don't see we have any other option than to just sit and hope for rescue."

"There's always options," said Violet. All this time the gears in her mind had been turning, clicking and ticking away as she thought of a plan, and she did have a few ideas. "We may not be able to get out and escape, but we're not completely helpless. We can try to turn our captors against each other. We can wait until one of them makes a mistake. We can try and get one of them to come over to our side and help us."

"Good ideas," said Clair, "but I'm gonna hope that our friends come bursting through the door and kick some evil ass."

"Me too," said Violet. "But if no one comes, if it really looks like we're finished, I'll rip The Necronomicon to shreds. If I'm gonna die, I make sure that these horrible, horrible people don't summon an even more horrible creature that will destroy the world."

"I hope we also take one or two of them with us," said Clair. She then smiled, "Hey, Violet, we're friends now, right?"

"I don't think we could be anything else, considering the situation," said Violet, "so, yeah, we're friends."

"If we get out of this in one piece," said Clair, "wanna hang out some time? Catch a movie or go shopping? I'm not that into fashion but I know some pretty good book and music stores."

"I'd love nothing more than to be a normal teenager for once," said Violet, "okay, we get out of this, we'll hang out. Just name the time and place."

"Deal," said Clair, "and I'd shake your hand if I could reach it."

Just then, Icy laughed cruelly, "too bad you won't live long enough to keep that bargain!"

"You sick bitch!" snapped Clair, "just let me lose! I'll rip your eyes out and make you eat them!"

"Oh, now that's just gross," said Icy, "if you're going to serve me eyeballs, at least cook them right."

"Are you even human?" Violet asked, "isn't there any good within you?"

"Now why would you ask a silly question like that?" Darcy asked as she and Stormy walked over, "we're the best witches in The Magical Dimension."

"And by best, we mean darkest," said Stormy. "We're so bad, not even those pathetic Winx and their Specialist boy toys could destroy us."

"If you're so super bad," said Clair, "how come you haven't tried to take The Necronomicon from Violet?"

"That's what I want to know," said Lucas as he, Eliza, Dalton, Paulette and Orlando, walked over, "the book is here for the taking, yet the little girl still has it in her hands!"

"We've been planning this for a long time," said Paulette, "our patience only goes so far."

"So why delay?" Orlando asked.

"Or are you just messing with us?" Dalton asked.

"I thought that was my department," said Eliza. She then took out a handful of pebbles and began tossing them up at Clair, whom tried to avoid them but kept getting hit.

"Stop that!" snapped Violet.

"No," said Eliza as she threw more pebbles at Clair, hitting one right between her eyes, earning a cry of pain.

"Oh, that won't do," said Eliza in a disappointed tone, "you're off key. I was hoping for something like this," she then threw a larger pebble,

one that had a sharp edge. It cut Clair on her lower lip, causing a higher pitched cry of pain as she felt her bleeding lip.

"That's more like it," said Eliza.

"You disgusting bitch!" snapped Violet, "you sick, inhuman lunatic! I... I'll... !"

"You'll what?!" Eliza snapped. She then threw a larger pebble at Violet, only for it to bounce off of the energy barrier protecting Violet.

"None of us can harm the girl," said Lucas. He then glared at Icy, Darcy and Stormy, "which brings us back to my original question. What are you doing about liberating The Necronomicon for the waif's hands?"

"We're working on it," said Darcy, "what, you think that my sisters and I have been sitting on our butts drinking tea and gossiping about the latest pop stars?"

"We've been figuring out how to get that book to stop protecting the girl," said Stormy. She then glared irately at Dalton, "and stop ogling my ass!"

"But it's such an exquisite specimen of fanny," said Dalton as he looked at Stormy in a possessive manner, "while the rest of you is equally desirable."

"Thank you," said Stormy as she smiled seductively. She then shot a bolt of dark lightning at Dalton, whom barely avoided being electrocuted, "now keep your eyes to yourself, little boy! I only date men, real men!"

"Oh, she got you good!" giggled Eliza.

"Men," said a disgruntled Paulette.

"And I'll thank you to keep your eyes off of me!" said Darcy irately to Paulette, "I don't swing that way."

"A pity you don't," said Paulette in a pouting tone. She then blew Darcy a kiss, whom turned her head away in annoyance.

"I'll thank you Earthlings to keep your eyes, ears, noses, tongues and hands off of my sisters and I," said Icy to Lucas, "we're crazy, but we have standards." She then burped up another fly, causing Stormy and Darcy to giggle.

"How many does that make it now?" Lucas asked.

"I lost count," giggled Darcy.

"Shut up!" shouted Icy. She then burped up another fly, which caused Lucas and his gang to laugh with Darcy and Stormy.

Clair then winked at Violet, as if indicating the strife already there between the Monster-Haters and The Trix.

Just as the baddies were calming down from their laughing fit, one of Lucas's goons showed him a message on a cell phone. After reading it, Lucas glared at Icy with outraged eyes, "well, Ms. All Powerful Queen Of Darkness! Get this latest fiasco! Those freaks and mutants, they survived the trap, all of them."

"What?" Icy asked, "impossible! There's no way they could have escaped that explosion."

"We prepared that magic bomb ourselves," said Darcy, "there's no way they could have survived, not all of them."

"You telling me that none got burned to a crisp?" Stormy asked, "not even one?"

"Not so much as a hair singed," said Lucas, "not only that, but the group with Patricia Walker has teamed up with Frankie Stein and the rest of the freaks. And worse still, more Bureau operatives have linked up with the main group."

"So, there's more of them," said Icy in a stubborn but slightly nervous tone, "they're still no match for us!"

"With these items and your drugs," said Stormy, indicating the accessories worn by the three witches, "we're unstoppable."

"Your items won't last if you keep using them so much," said Lucas, "and while Soma-99 is perfect, my cabal and I have a limited supply and won't get more until the ritual is complete."

"Which is why we're moving the sacrificial victims to the ritual location," said Paulette.

"Now?" Darcy asked, "you're moving them now?"

"We don't have the book yet," said Stormy, "and Quantummad666 isn't here yet."

"Quantummad666 will meet us at the place of sacrifice," said Lucas, "that was the original end result of the plan. Besides, I won't take any chances. The Bureau may be full of mutants, but they're tenacious mutants. If they so much as get a single clue as to our whereabouts, they'll hunt us down and shoot us like dogs."

"Well, this little doggie isn't ready to go to the doghouse," said Icy, "I'll move the sacrifices. Darcy, Stormy, you stay here with Lucas and his group. I'd like you all to prepare a few more surprises for our unwanted friends."

"Can we do something better than a bomb?" Stormy asked, "blowing those losers up seemed like a good idea at the time, but I know we can do better."

"I'll leave that to you, dear sisters," said Icy, "let your imaginations run wild."

"With pleasure," said Darcy, while Stormy eagerly nodded in vicious agreement.

"Okay, now's a good time to think of another option," said Clair to Violet, "we're running out of time."

"I know," said Violet in an annoyed and nervous tone, "I'm thinking, but... nothing's coming." Indeed, the gears in her mind were working overtime, desperately trying to crank out a plan, any plan that would help her and Clair. Yet for all her mental efforts, no ideas illuminated themselves, no other options were revealed to her.

Violet looked down in despair, but in an instant, a new option dawned on her, an option that up until now she had never considered, yet was right under her nose all along.

"The Necronomicon," she said, "we can use it."

"Excuse me?" Clair asked, "I don't think I heard you right."

"I said we can use The Necronomicon," said Violet.

At that statement, Clair blinked in confusion. She then glared irately at Violet, "either you're jerking my chain, or you've lost it; I just can't tell which."

"I'm not kidding," said Violet, "nor am I going crazy. We can use the book. It's one thing our enemies won't expect."

"And for good reason," said Clair, "that book has caused the deaths of countless people for thousands of years. You have to be either insane or evil to want to use it for anything."

"Or desperate," said Violet, "and right now, our situation is quickly becoming desperate enough to do something about it."

"I agree that we should do something," said Clair, "but not consorting with the darkness. Good God, Violet! That book is evil, pure and simple!"

"If it's so evil," said Violet, "how come it's protecting me?"

"It's protecting itself," said Clair, "you just happen to be holding it."

"This would be an appropriate situation for the phrase 'never look a gift horse in the mouth,'" said Violet, "we have an opportunity to turn things around on our captors."

She then held the book in a position where she could easily open and read it, "there's got to be something in here that can help us escape, maybe take them down before they try to sacrifice us."

"But at what cost?" Clair asked, "Everyone who has ever used that book has wound up either dead or incurably insane. Our captors are doomed one way or another; are you so willing to share their fate? Do you want to be ripped apart by some otherworldly abomination? Do you want to lose your mind and never get it back?"

At that the gears in Violet's mind grinded to a halt. Violet blinked in confusion as a fog that she never realized was there suddenly cleared from her mind. Able to think clearly again, she looked down at the book she was ready to open. She involuntarily shuddered as she turned the book around so the spine was facing up, then gripped the covers so it couldn't be open either way.

"I... I don't know what came over me," she said, "I... I could have destroyed us both. I could have let in something that would have destroyed the world."

"It's that thing in your hands," said Clair in a disgusted tone as she pointed an accusing finger at The Necronomicon, "it's trying to make you read it."

Violet felt the urge to fling the book as far away from her as she could. But then she realized that if she did, then The Trix and the Monster-Haters would be able to use it. Even at that thought, Violet felt a pulling in the back of her mind, an urge to open and read the book.

"So long as I hold it," said Violet, "it'll protect me. But on the other hand, so long as I hold it, the more it'll try and make me use it. And if I let it go to protect myself, then our captors will have it."

"Damned either way," said Clair. She then looked at Violet with eyes that were on the verge of losing hope, "we really are in trouble."

"Yeah," said Violet as her eyes betrayed her near loss of hope as well.

"What's that you two losers are mumbling?" Icy asked as she hovered up to the two energy cages.

"Nothing that would interest you, you alien psychopath!" snapped Clair. Though she was losing hope on the inside, there was no way she'd let the enemy know that.

Violet felt the same, "just because we're at your mercy, such as it is, doesn't mean we're beaten!"

At that Icy smiled cruelly, "when is it going to get through your thick heads? You've lost! We've won!"

"It's not over yet," said Clair, "a lot can happen between now and when you slaughter us."

"And you still have to get me to give this up," said Violet as she held up The Necronomicon.

"I'll cross that bridge when I get to it," said Icy, "for now, I believe a change in location is desired. Oh, and don't think that your friends are still coming. They got lucky last time, but this time we'll be ready for them," she then glared at Darcy and Stormy, whom had been laying trap spells in and outside the building, "right, sisters?"

"We'll be ready for those pathetic heroes," said Stormy, "you just get the ritual set up for us."

"And figure out how to get the brat to cough up the book!" said Darcy.

"You'd better get the book," said an irate Lucas as his goons set up traps of their own, "or we'll see which of us is superior."

"A contest that's already decided," said Icy as she smirked. She then looked at Violet and Clair, "let's go." She then burped up another fly.

"I just want to go on record that I hate teleporting," said Clair.

"Too bad," said Icy, before burping up yet another fly. She then teleported herself and the two crystal cages out of the building, taking Clair and Violet with her.

... 548 Hudson Street...

"There's no sign of a break-in or anything out of the ordinary at this store," said Max as our heroes and allies waited across the street from The End of History, the ceramic and glass store that the clue lead them to. "Patricia, are you sure the lab tech boys got it right?"

"That ceramic shard came from a vase sold at this store not less than four days ago," said Patricia, "one of our enemies was here."

"I don't understand," said Venus, "why would a bunch of dark witches and drug addicts be doing at such a respectable establishment?"

"Who knows what goes on inside the mind of a villain?" Rochelle asked, "who knows what turns an innocent heart to the darkness?"

"Drugs and magic," said Malcolm, "both are equally addictive."

"If magic's so dangerous," said Operetta, "then why do it?"

"Because it's part of who I am," said Malcolm. He then used an illusion spell, summoning seven small fireballs and began juggling them, "magic is in the blood of everyone where I'm from, both those

who use it for good and those who use it for evil. Even those who partake in the dark arts, so long as we hold light in our hearts, we're safe from the darkness."

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"She wants to know about The Trix," said Clawd, "where do they walk?"

"Beyond all hope of reason and redemption," said Riku.

"Amen to that," said Tess as she sharpened her razor, "let's just hope that we can put this version of them out of their insane misery."

"And what of Lucas?" Lilith asked, "is he beyond all hope for reason and redemption? What about the rest of his cabal? Can they be saved?"

"You sound like you want to save them," said Lagoon.

"Now that I've had a chance to calm down," said Lilith, "I do want to save them, those that can be saved. Lucas is so deep in his own delusions that nothing can help him. Eliza's the same, she's always been unbalanced. Orlando, Dalton and Paulette, we might be able to help them. I'm not sure about the rest, though."

"We'll do what we can to help them," said Aaron, "if I can get a sample of the drug, Soma-99, I may be able to synthesize a counter agent that'll clean up their systems. Of course, with any drug detoxification, they'll be withdraw symptoms, but they'll get through them."

"Assuming they let us catch them," said Leon.

"Let's just focus on saving the girls and recovering the book," said Laura, "afterwards we can worry about capturing any of the junkies left alive."

"And killing The Trix," said Tess.

"You're a woman after my heart, Tess Thatcher," said Jill as she sat down to polish her new saber, "warm, passionate, loving, but cold, hard and merciless when needed."

"I had to learn how to be cold, hard and merciless the hard way," said Tess, "but I had my friends remind me how to be warm again, to remind me how to love."

"Something awful must have happened to you, Tammy," said Kairi.

"I... had a rough childhood," said Tess, "we all suffered in our own way before our Keyblades chose us," she then looked at Sora, Riku and Malcolm, "ain't that right? Sam? Rick? Mitch?"

"Oh... yeah... we did suffer," said Riku hastily, while Sora and Malcolm nodded in agreement.

Just then J.D. walked over, "out tech guys pulled up the security footage from the past few days in the area. Some of the Monster Haters described my Mrs. Stein and her friends were seen on this street and one of them had bought a vase in the store, but that's it. There's nothing else that could give us a clue as to where they are."

"At least we know they were here," said Solaris.

"Can you smell anything?" Jackson asked Clawdeen, "any sign of Clair?"

"Any sign of Violet?" Draculaura asked Clawd.

"There's too many scents to make anything out," said Clawd as he and Clawdeen sniffed the air, "car exhaust, asphalt, nearby restaurants and countless Normie scents."

"Like trying to find a flea with a toothache," said Clawdeen.

"Oh, that's a good one," said Operetta, "can I use that sometime?"

"Help yourself," said Clawdeen, "it's not helping me right now."

"Wait, I... I think I got something!" said Howleen as she sniffed the air, "I think... yes, it's Clair! And... I picked up Violet's scent too!"

"Well, don't keep us in suspense, girl!" said Julia, "where are they?"

"The scents, they're to the north!" said Howleen, "come on!"

Everyone got into the vans again, with Howleen in the lead van with the windows open. They followed her directions as she followed the scents on the wind. They went North on Hudson Street and turned right onto Perry Street. They went two blocks East and turned left onto West 4th Street. They then went north for one block and turned right onto West 11th Street for several blocks, past 7th Avenue and Greenwich Avenue, arriving at an empty warehouse near St. Vincent's Hospital.

"What is it about villains and hiding out in abandoned buildings?" Kairi asked as the vans pulled up outside the warehouse, "if they were to rent an apartment or hotel room, they'd have a better chance of avoiding detection."

"Who knows what our enemies were thinking," said Patricia.

"This particular warehouse used to store medical supplies for the hospital," said J.D. as he read some data on the building, "before it was infested with rats."

"Rats?" Lilith asked in a nervous tone, "I hate rats!"

"I never knew that," said Chad.

"You never asked," said Lilith.

"Well, it's been cleaned out of rats," said J.D. as he read more data, "but then they found that the wooden superstructure was infested with termites." He then looked at our heroes and allies, "anyone here afraid of termites?"

There was a rousing chorus of 'no,' 'nope,' and 'uh-uh,' from everyone.

"Good, then here's the plan," said Patricia. "First thing we need to consider is the nearby hospital. We cannot afford to allow any innocent bystanders to get in the crossfire," she then sent a message out from her cell phone, "so I've... 'arranged' for a reason to evacuate the hospital. Once all the doctors, patients and so on are clear, we'll move in and take those witches and lunatics down, save the girls, grab The Necronomicon and be home in time to catch the early morning news."

"You watch early, early morning news?" Abbey asked, "when do you sleep?"

"I rarely sleep more than two or three hours a day," said Patricia, "not since my powers woke up."

"You're what they call a Screamer, right?" Lagoona asked, "a sonic yell."

"You betcha," said Patricia, "though I haven't had much chance to go all out since I broke my ankle and it didn't heal right."

"I could have fixed it if I had the time," said Aaron, "just break it again and make sure it's set right this time."

"And spend weeks on my back and more weeks in rehabilitation therapy?" Patricia asked, "no thanks. I'm doing just fine the way I am."

"And when did you last run?" Jill asked.

"I was never a good runner," said Patricia.

A short time later the hospital was evacuated, with the official reason given as a gas leak. "They'll be chasing a nonexistent gas leak for hours," said Patricia, "now, what's on the inside of that warehouse?"

"Uh, boss?" J.D. asked after looking at his computer, "I think we have a problem. I can't get a fix on the interior of the warehouse. They're jamming us again."

"Yeah, they're jamming us alright," said Laura, while Katina nodded in agreement.

"Sons of bitches," remarked Patricia, "it's never easy."

"We do know they're here," said Howleen as she sniffed the air, "I can smell both Violet and Clair."

"And those witches," said Clawd.

"And the junkies," said Clawdeen.

"Well, we've got two choices of action," said Patricia, "we can call in additional agents and lay siege to the warehouse, but who knows how they'll react to that?"

"They'll either give up, dig in for a fight to the finish," said Solaris in between bites of wasabi-laced fruits and vegetables, "or they might be provoked into killing the hostages."

"Forget about that!" said Jill.

"Alright, I will," said Solaris.

"Then we'll just have to go in and get them," said Patricia, "carefully this time."

"Oh, please," said Cleo, "like we'd fall for another bomb in the building." Just then something shiny caught her eye on the ground a few feet away, "is that... it is! A diamond!" she then rushed over and picked up a 5 karat diamond, "and look! There's another! And another! And another!" Giddy as a girl in a jewelry shop, Cleo happily followed a trail of diamonds.

"Uh, Cleo? I don't think you should be doing that," said Deuce in a worried tone.

"They're just diamonds, Deuce," said Cleo as she picked up another one, "they're a girl's best friend after all."

"I thought we were her best bloodies," said an offended Draculaura.

"Well, considering that this is Cleo we're talking about," said Toralei, "I'm not surprised."

"Remind me why you're here?" Clawd asked.

"Because it pleases me to be here," said Toralei. "I may not like Clair, but I'll be damned if I let her be mistreated by a gang of drug addicts."

Cleo then came upon a diamond the size of a ping pong ball, "oh, sweet sparkly delight! Come to mama!"

Just then Katina tensed up, "don't touch it!" she shouted. But her warning came too late as Cleo picked the large diamond up. Instantly it began to flash red.

Sora, Riku, Deuce, Clawdeen, Jill and Leon all tried to get to Cleo and knock the flashing diamond away, but Ken, whom had been following Cleo, grabbed it and pushed her back to Deuce. Ken was about to throw the diamond away, but then it exploded. The force of the detonation knocked everyone down and when they got back up again, Ken Somerset lay on the ground, charred, broken and dead.

"Oh my god!" exclaimed Felicia, "they killed Kenny!"

"You bastards!" snapped a wrathful Julia. She then clicked the safety off on her Nitro Express riffle and charged towards the warehouse.

"Stop it!" said Leon as he chased after her, moving like lightning to catch Julia and pull her back, just as she stepped on a cloaked bear

trap. The steel jaws closed just as Julia was pulled away, but then the bear trap sparked with electricity.

"Christ! That could have killed me," said Julia as she and Leon got back up.

"Get back here! Now!" shouted Katina.

Julia and Leon started back just in time to avoid being impaled by spikes that shot out of the ground. But then more spikes shot up, impaling Leon in both legs.

"Crap!" shouted Leon through gritted teeth as the spikes retracted, leaving him on the ground and bleeding severely.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Patricia as Mark and Steven ran to grab Leon, while Aaron rushed in with his black medical bag. "How the frak did they get the drop on us like that!?"

"I don't know," said Max, "I just don't know."

... Hogwarts...

"Oh, Jesus!" exclaimed Leon as he watched himself impaled, "I forgot how much that hurt."

"Did that really happen to you?" Naminé asked.

"I've got the scars to prove it," said Leon. He then rolled up his pants legs, revealing several old scars on his legs.

"Oh, please," said Andrew, "it didn't hurt that much."

"Are you kidding!?" Leon asked, "I was laid up for weeks." He then looked at Roxas and Naminé, "this was before we had such wonderful healing techniques mixed with magic."

"I'll tell you exactly what hurt more than that," said Andrew, "remember that time on your birthday back on '05?"

"Was that the year I got drunk and ran naked through a mall and wound up nearly drowning in a fountain?" Leon asked.

"No, that was in '04," said Max, "by the time we got to you, you ate nearly two dollars in quarters."

"And don't ask how many nickels, dimes and pennies he ate," said Aaron.

"Well, was it the year I got drunk and ran naked through a carwash?" Leon asked.

"That was in '06," said Ron, "I remember that year, you got hot wax in your eyes."

"Took us nine weeks to rebuild his retinas," said Aaron to Roxas and Naminé, "And don't ask me where else on him I had to remove hot wax."

"Oh, wait, now I remember," said Leon, "'05 was the year I got drunk and ran naked through a cactus farm. Yeah, that hurt like a son of a bitch."

"Maybe getting drunk on your birthday isn't such a good idea," said Roxas.

"That's what we've been telling him for over a decade!" said Ginny, while Hermione nodded in agreement, "Jill, back me up on this... Jill? Are you alright?"

But Jill wasn't alright. She looked like she was having a panic attack as she watched the viewer, seeing the other Aaron treat the other Leon, while Ken's body was taken to one of the Bureau vans and covered.

"Let me out," said Jill in a frantic tone, "I can't watch this!" she then rushed for the door and left the room.

"What's made her so upset?" Draco asked.

At that Andrew glared hatefully at Draco, "she just watched one of her friends die for the second time, you pompous son of a bitch!" With that he ran after Jill, with Roxas and Naminé following.

"You really need to learn how to keep your mouth shut, Malfoy," said Ginny.

"Shove it, Potter," said Draco.

Out in the hallway, Roxas and Naminé found Andrew comforting a hyperventilating Jill.

"It's okay, Jill," said Andrew as he placed a hand on her heaving shoulders, "it's going to be okay."

"I... I can't watch... Andrew!" gasped Jill as she sat down, while Andrew sat next to her, "I can't watch our friends die again!"

"We don't know that they're going to die," said Andrew, "this isn't *our* past, it's a different reality altogether."

"You saw the other John and Rebecca die!" said Jill, "and now Ken! And Leon got spiked, just like before! It's happening like before! They're going to die and we can't stop it!"

"How many times do I have to say it!?" exclaimed Andrew, "this isn't a repeat of the past!"

"And things are different than what happened before," said Roxas.

At that Jill glared irately at Roxas, "how the bloody hell do you know?! You weren't there on our world when this happened!"

"I know," said Roxas, "but whatever happened before, your other selves have something that you guys didn't have."

"What?" Jill asked.

"Sora and the others," said Naminé.

At that Jill began to calm down, "oh, well, I guess that's different. After all, you Keyblade Wielders do have a knack of meddling."

"It's a curse," said Roxas, "go figure."

Aaron then walked up to them, "are you alright, Jill? You haven't had a panic attack like this in over a decade."

"It's not every day you get to see history repeat itself," said Jill as Andrew helped her stand up, "I'm starting to feel like I'm getting too old for this line of work."

"I feel old too," said Andrew, "but I seem to remember you saying that you'll keep fighting the good fight until they nail your coffin shut."

"There are times when I wish I wasn't so honest," said Jill. She then sighed, "well, what's happening on the other side of reality?"

"My counterpart has Leon's counterpart stabilized," said Aaron, "while the other Patricia is trying to figure out what the hell happened."

"It's those witches and drug crazies," said Roxas, "they booby trapped the warehouse."

"Gee, it must be National Obvious Day and I missed the memo," said Andrew as they all walked back into the room.

"Are you alright, Jill?" Max asked.

"Of course she's not alright," said Leon, "she just saw the other me get spiked. I'd be freaking out if I were Jill."

"If you were me," said Jill, "you wouldn't know what to do with me, believe it. I'm okay, Max, I... I'm just scared that history is going to repeat itself."

"It won't," said Harry, "if there's one thing I've learned about the greater picture of reality, it's that things don't always turn out the same time twice."

"The odds of two universes following the same exact path is too high to calculate," said Hermione, "at least for me."

"Virgil could have calculated it," said Max.

"I think you're right," said Ginny, "whatever did happen to Virgil Blake? He was working on some secret project in Cambodia, last I heard."

"It wasn't Cambodia, it was Laos," said Harry.

"I thought it was Cambodia," said Ginny.

"It was Thailand," said Hermione.

"It was Vietnam," said Max.

"It was Burma," said Jill.

"I thought he was in Malaysia with Laura," said Leon.

"He's been bouncing around South East Asia for the past three years," said Andrew, "And no one knows what he's doing."

"Who's Virgil?" Aiden asked as he and Ashley walked in. Aiden looked like he had just ran a marathon, but had an extremely satisfied expression on his face.

"Are you okay?" Naminé asked as she and Roxas got up.

"I just transmuted over six hundred parts without a break," said Aiden, "it's got to be a record."

"Just so long as you tell Malcolm that his potion was a success," said Roxas.

"I'll be sure to give him all the credit he's due," said Aiden. He then collapsed to the floor and began snoring.

"He's exhausted," said Aaron after examining him, "a few hours sleep and he'll be right as rain again."

"Better take him to the hospital wing to be sure," said Harry. He then used his wand to levitate Aiden and hovered him out of the room, with Aaron right behind them.

"That kid was incredible," said Ashley as she sat down, "I'm telling you, I had never seen the like. I swear, if we could figure out the kind of Alchemy Aiden uses, the prospects would be limitless!"

"That can wait, what about the machine?" Roxas asked.

"Oh, it's finished," said Ashley, "and being put together as I speak."

"That's wonderful," said Hermione. She then frowned, "wait a moment, who's putting it together?"

"If you're here," said Ron, "then who's out there with the machine parts?"

"Albus, Rose, Izzy and Scorpio," said Ashley, "they wanted to help, so I gave them the assembly instructions."

"What!?" exclaimed Ginny as she rushed over to Ashley and grabbed her by the shoulders, "you let four underage wizards tinker with a Muggle machine!? Are you insane!?"

"You allowed my son to risk his life with a Muggle machine!?" exclaimed Draco.

"My daughter is in this too, Malfoy!" snapped Ron.

"I'm sure the children are perfectly fine," said Hermione in a reassuring manner. "But, it would be a good idea to check in on them."

"You won't get any arguments from me," said Jill. With that she, Andrew, Ashley, Hermione, Ginny, Ron and Draco, all went down to the Great Hall, where the four children were busy assembling the portal projector.

"Oh, hi, mum, dad," said Rose as she snapped one part into place, "we'll be finished with this in no time."

"You sure you lot know what you're doing?" Ron asked.

"'Piece of cake,' as they say in America," said Izzy as she put another part into place.

"Once Rose figured out how to read the instructions," said Scorpio, "now, do I put this chip here or here?" he then held a microchip.

"Hang on a second," said Rose as she looked at the instructions, "it's a good thing I know how to read Kanji."

"You gave them instructions in Japanese script?" an exasperated Ginny asked Ashley.

"Why would you even have instructions in Kanji?" Andrew asked.

At that Ashley was without words for a second, a confused look on her face. "That's a good question," she finally said.

"Just be glad it's Kanji," said Albus, "at first, Rose thought it was Chinese."

Just then two individuals walked into The Great Hall, a boy and a girl, both in their teens. The girl was about 17, about 5'3" with short sandy blond hair, blue eyes and wore a camouflage shirt, pants and

boots along with the tan Bureau jacket. Attached to her belt was a large combat knife.

The boy was 18, over six feet tall with very short black hair, brown eyes and wore a blue and white shirt, blue jeans, black boots and a tan Bureau jacket. Over his shoulder was long spear with a steel head. Both of them carried tan duffle bags.

"Excuse me," said the girl, "can anyone tell me where we can find Jill Sparrow?"

"You've found her," said Jill, "you two the new blood we've been expecting?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy as he and the girl took out a set of papers from their pockets, "Hezekiah Hoffman and Jana Bachman, reporting for duty."

"Spare me the military attitude," said Jill as she read the papers, "we're not so formal as you were lead to believe. Hmmm... yes, everything looks to be in order," she looked at Jana Bachman and Hezekiah Hoffman, "you were briefed on the mission?"

"Rescue in a parallel dimension," said Jana Bachman as she smiled eagerly, "far out." she then looked at Roxas and Naminé, "hey, how's it going?"

"Pretty good," said Roxas, "considering that our friends are stuck on a parallel world fighting alternate versions of baddies that we've defeated twice."

"And now psychopathic drug addicts," said Naminé.

At that Hezekiah Hoffman sighed, "it sickens me to hear of good people succumbing to the evils of drugs."

"Yep, drugs are bad," said Izzy, "even in the wizarding world." She then looked at the parts in her hands, "now, where do these go?"

"Attach wire G-14 to circuit H-11," said Rose.

"Which wire is G-14?" Scorpio asked as he held up three wires, two green and one red.

"G-14 is a blue wire," said Rose.

"Oh, my mistake," said Scorpio.

"They'll be at this for a while," said Ashley.

"Figures," said Hezekiah, "and here I am without a book to read."

"You should have planned for moments of boredom," said Jana Bachman. She then pulled out of her duffle bag a tin box full of cards, "anyone here play Yu-Gi-Oh?"

"Never heard of it," said Roxas, while Naminé shook her head.

"Not me," said Scorpio.

"What? How can you not know of Yu-Gi-Oh?" Izzy asked, "it's one of the greatest trading card games of all time."

"You collect the cards?" Jana asked.

"I've got cards dating back to the original Yugi and Seto starter decks," said Izzy, "I must have over 20,000 cards in my closet back home. I brought some of them with me my first year at Hogwarts, but no one else did, so left mine at home this year. Can I look at yours?"

"Help yourself," said Jana, "you like the anime?"

"Best anime ever!" said Izzy as she looked through the cards, "even all the strange filler arcs that weren't in the manga. GX was cool too, until they horribly messed things up with the ending of season 3."

"I hated how that season ended," said Jana, "turned me off of the anime. And then 5D's came out and I wanted nothing to do with it. I

mean, honestly, Dueling on motorcycles? How stupid can you get?"

"I know," said Izzy.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Albus.

"It's okay, I've got other stuff to stave off the boredom," said Jana. She then pulled out of her backpack a Nintendo DS, "anyone here play Pokemon?"

"They'll be occupied for a while," said Ashley to Ron, Hermione, Ginny and Draco.

"In the meantime," said Hermione, "we should think of something we can do to help."

"And what would that be, Granger?" Draco asked.

"Why don't you use your own brain and figure it out, Malfoy?" Ginny asked, "do something useful for once."

"Just for that, Weasley, I will!" said an irate Draco, "now, if you'll excuse me, I have some thinking to do!" he then nodded to his son, "Scorpio."

"Father," said Scorpio. He then looked at another part, "now, where does this one go?"

"That's for later," Rose said, "this one goes in first."

"Oh, now I see," said Scorpio, "I had the other one backwards."

"This is going to be a long day," muttered Ron.

"You think things are slow now?" Ashley asked, "wait till the machine is put together. I've got to calibrate and fine tune the settings before we can open a portal to the other world."

"Exactly how much longer is it going to be?" Naminé asked, "no more bull crapping us about this, Ashley. Just tell Roxas and me the truth."

"You want the truth?" Ashley asked, "I honestly don't know how much longer."

"Figures," said an annoyed Roxas.

... Manhattan, outside St. Vincent's Hospital...

"Those frakers have seeded the ground around the warehouse with every booby trap in the book and then some," said J.D., "bear traps, trip wires, ponji stick, pitfalls, spike traps, I.E.D's., regular land mines. And then there's the magic-based traps; elemental wards, storms of blades, acid jets, vicious creature summoning wards, the list goes on."

"Boy, when those witches and drug lunatics pull out the stops, they really pull out the stops," said Gill.

"This is just the preliminaries," said Max, "wait until we actually get to them."

"You're serious about continuing," said Kairi, "after what just happened. One of your own was murdered and another's crippled!"

"I'm not crippled!" exclaimed Leon as he tried to sit up as Aaron worked on his legs. Aaron pushed him back down.

"Keep struggling and you will be crippled!" said Aaron, "you're lucky the spikes missed your left femoral artery. A millimeter more and you'll have bleed out in seconds. Now all I've got to worry about is muscle, bone and nerve damage."

"I'm fine, doc!" said Leon, "just stitch me up and I'll get back in the game."

"You're sitting the rest of this out, man!" said Aaron as he prepared a syringe full of sodium pentothal. "I'll sedate you if I have to, but you're finished for this mission."

"Doctor's orders, Leon," said Patricia, "I'm sorry, but you're benched."

"Bull crap!" snapped Leon as he sat up and pushed Aaron away.

"That does it!" said an irate Aaron, "Mark, Steven, sit on this Cajun idiot for a while, will you?"

"It'd be my pleasure," said Mark. He and Steven rushed over and pushed Leon down, then held him still while Aaron administered the sedative.

"You bastards!" shouted Leon, "you're so off my Christmas list! I hope you get nothing but coal in your stockings forever!" with that he then passed out.

"There are times when I wished I had gone into general practice," said Aaron as Steven and Mark stepped away from Leon, then went back to work on his legs, "those doctors receive more gratitude from their patients."

"Not all the time," said Frankie, "my dad's a medical scientist and some of his patients hate his guts."

"At least your father makes more money," said Aaron, "I've got access to the most advanced medical technology on the planet, some of which I helped invent, but does that entitle me to a bigger paycheck? No, and I don't care that much. Why? Because I enjoy healing my fellow Meta Humans because I know they're doing what they can to hold back the darkness, and so am I. There," he then stood up from Leon's heavily bandaged legs, "that'll do for now. We'll get him back to the hotel for a more secure leg casting, and more sedation if needed."

"In the meantime, we've got a tough nut to crack," said Julia.

"Okay," said Max as he, Jill and Katina looked at the warehouse, "how do you want to do this?"

"If we still had The Mega Mole, we could tunnel under that warehouse in a flash," said Jill.

"What do you mean 'still' had it?" Katina asked.

"We broke it a year after you left," said Max.

"You mean *you* broke it," said Jill. "You jammed the gears and the whole thing fell apart."

"So I can't drive stick!" Max shouted, "big deal!"

"My eye it was a big deal!" exclaimed Jill, "that was a \$20,000,000 piece of hardware you tore apart!"

"Hey, don't argue," said Kairi, "it's not..."

"She's the one making a big deal out of it, not me!" said Max irately.

"Well, listen to you," said Jill in a smug tone, "you, always going on about how the mission comes first and not let personal problems get in the way."

"At least I'm still not pinning over a lost love," said Max, "oh, yeah, I know you're still upset over Andrew. You're only harping on me because The Mega Mole was one of his projects."

"At least he used his talents to make things!" snapped Jill, "where as you, 'Destructicus Maximus,' you're just a walking disaster."

"At least I never lost my head over a child who wasn't even a blood relative!" exclaimed Max. He then looked horrified at his own words, immediately regretting what he said.

Unfortunately, Jill had taken it extremely personal. "You son of a bitch!" she shouted, then punched Max in the face. There was a soft cracking sound and Jill flinched back, cradling her hand and shouting in pain.

"Oh, that's a broken bone, alright," said Clawd, "I heard it all the way from here."

"I heard at least three bones break," said Howleen.

"It never ends," muttered Aaron as he hurried over with his medical bag, "just hold still, Jill, I'll set it right."

"Good grief, Max!" said Jill as Aaron checked her hand, "your face is like a rock."

"I'm sorry you hurt yourself, Jill," said Max, "and I'm sorry I hurt your feelings."

"Well, my hand still hurts," said Jill, "but I'm sorry I hurt your feelings too."

"I can help," said Kairi as she walked over, "I'm pretty good with healing magic."

"She is," said Frankie.

"With all due respect to your abilities, Kairi," said Patricia, "but Aaron prefers to treat his patients without magic."

"Not that I don't trust magic," said Aaron as he prepared a syringe of lidocaine, "but I know Jill and the others. I know what makes them tick." He then injected the anesthetic into Jill's hand. She winced at the needle penetration, then relaxed as her hand went numb.

"There," said Aaron as he set the bones and began bandaging Jill's hand, "now don't you feel silly for getting upset over something illogical?"

"Damn right I feel silly," said Jill as she looked at her bandage hand, "and lucky. I could have broken my sword hand."

"I'm not gonna bench you for this, Jill," said Aaron, "but promise me that you won't take any unnecessary chances."

"I'll try," said Jill, "but nothing will get done if we just stand around here talking."

"It'd help if we had a better idea of what was going on in that warehouse," said J.D.

At that Ghoulia moaned something.

"Ghoulia's right," said Lagoona, "it would help if we knew the exact pattern of the traps."

"Why not use Cleo's teleporting amulet?" Draculaura asked.

"That's brilliant! We'll teleport right up to the warehouse!" said Malcolm.

"It would be brilliant," Cleo as she held up the teleportation idol, "except that I drained it when I teleported everyone out of the last warehouse. It'll be hours before it can be used again."

"Well, that's one plan down the drain," said Malcolm.

Just then Operetta looked around, "hey, where's Rochelle?"

"I thought she was with you," said Rebecca.

"She's up there!" shouted Venus as she pointed up. Rochelle was flying towards the warehouse, hovering above the ground and taking pictures with her cell phone.

"What is she doing!?" exclaimed Julia, "hey you! Get back down here! You're just opening yourself up to a sneak attack!"

As if in response, a bolt of dark lightning shot out from the ground and hit Rochelle in the right shoulder, knocking her out of the air. She hit the ground hard. Seconds later, five Monster Haters appeared from concealed positions, along with Darcy and Stormy, and all of them converged on Rochelle.

"You bastards!" shouted Julia as she took aim with her Nitro Express riffle, "get away from her!" she then pulled the trigger, shooting one cartridge and hitting one Monster Hater in the chest. The bullet passed through, turning the torso of the drug addled teen into red slush, killing him before he hit the ground.

At the same time, Felicia threw one of her knives, hitting another Monster Hater, stabbing her in the heart, killing her instantly.

But then Dalton and Paulette appeared and grabbed Rochelle, while Darcy and Stormy stood in front of her, "I'd stop that, if I were you!" Darcy shouted.

In response, Julia aimed and fired the other cartridge in her double barrel riffle. The bullet hit Darcy in the middle of her chest, knocking her down. But a few seconds later she got up, sore and sluggish but otherwise unharmed.

"You stupid mutant!" snapped Darcy as she held a hand over where she got shot, "I'm gonna be bruised for weeks! Stop shooting me!"

"I'll stop when you're dead, you crazy witch!" snapped Julia as she loaded fresh cartridges, while Felicia readied another knife.

"You do that and your freaky friend is toast!" shouted Stormy as she summoned a ball of dark lightning and held it up to Rochelle's head.

"Hurt her and you deal with me!" shouted Clawdeen as she barred her teeth and talons.

"And me!" shouted Kairi as she summoned her Keyblade.

"What the... ! Another Keyblade brat!?" exclaimed Stormy.

"You two won't remember me," said Kairi, "but I know who you are! And your frigid elder sister."

At that Darcy laughed, "yeah, Icy really has a cold heart. But enough about that. All of you, just stay where you are, or stone girl here gets it."

" *Non!* " shouted Rochelle, "don't listen to them, *mes amis!* "

"Quiet you!" spat Dalton. He then slapped Rochelle across the face.

"I'll shred you for that!" shouted Toralei. She then realized that Frankie and the others were looking at her like she had just done something strange. "What? I care about Rochelle. Nobody abuses my fellow Monsters but me."

"You sure have a funny way of appreciating us," said Frankie.

"Hey, wait, where's Venus?" Rebecca asked.

"I thought she was with you," said Operetta, "and come to think of it, where's Spectra?"

"Forget about Spectra!" said a startled Cleo, "what is Venus doing!?"

Everyone then saw Venus walk towards the Monster-Haters and witches, carrying a makeshift white flag in her hands.

"How is she avoiding the traps?" J.D. asked.

"I saw her looking at her phone a moment ago," said Heath.

"I bet I know what the dilio is," said Abbey as she looked at Ghoulia, whom was sitting on the ground with her laptop open. She then glanced upward and gave the thumbs up. Sora looked up and saw Spectra hovering high above the area, her digital camera linked to her phone.

"I get it," said Riku, "Spectra is transmitting a birds eye view of the area to Ghoulia, whom must have made a map of the traps."

"Rochelle must have been bait to draw the enemy's attention away from Spectra," said Deuce.

Ghoulia moaned in affirmation, then sent an email to J.D.'s computer, revealing a detailed map of the traps surrounding the warehouse.

"But Ghoulia only finished the map just now," said Jackson, "how did Venus know?"

"She must be sensing the traps somehow," said Laura.

"Then what was Venus doing with phone?" Abbey asked.

Just then Frankie received a text, "Venus sent it. She's gonna draw their attention so we can do something."

"But what?" Felicia asked, "there's no way one girl can distract all of them."

"She can," said Rebecca, "just give her a chance."

All this time, Venus was carefully avoiding the traps and making her way closer to the Monster-Haters and the two witches.

"Well, look at this," said Paulette in a scornful tone, "a Monster with a death wish."

"She's either crazy or just plain stupid," said Stormy.

"Stupid is as stupid does," said Venus, "so just take it easy, all of you. I only want to talk."

"Care to make an epitaph?" Dalton asked as he shoved Rochelle to the ground, "or you just want 'R.I.P.' on your grave?"

"I've already arranged for my body to be mulched when I die," said Venus, "but that's not important right now."

"And just what is?" Darcy asked in a daring tone, "on second thought, I don't care. You!" she then gestured to the Monster Haters, "go get her! We just picked up a second hostage!"

"Do it!" said Paulette to the other Monster Haters. They advanced on Venus, whom calmly stood her ground and held her hands out to them. She then exhaled deeply, blowing a stream of pollen in their faces. The Monster-Haters stopped in their tracks, a look of utter confusion on their faces.

"She's confounded them!" said Jill.

"But I thought Venus's power only worked on one person at a time," said Frankie.

"That's her Persuasion Pollen," said Lagoona to Kairi and the other humans, "Venus can compel someone into obeying her."

"She doesn't like to use it," said Draculaura, "but if she catches you polluting the environment, even if it's as small as littering, she will make you see the light."

"I'll bet Venus is using a new kind of pollen," said Clawdeen, "one that works on more than one person at a time."

"And here I thought I knew everything there was to know about everyone at Monster High," said Toralei.

"I've got secrets from you," said Clawdeen.

"Oh really?" Toralei asked, "name one."

"If she told you, then it wouldn't be a secret, now would it?" Cleo asked.

"All the more reason for me to know," said Toralei.

"Talk about secrets later!" Abbey insisted, "Venus is about to be making the moves."

Indeed, Venus had moved past the confused Monster Haters and was getting closer to Dalton, Paulette, Stormy, Darcy and Rochelle.

"That's a fancy trick you've got," said Dalton, "but it's not gonna work on us!"

"Maybe it will," said Venus, "or maybe it won't. We'll just have to see what happens next."

"Keep back, you plant freak!" snapped Stormy, "or I'll zap you to a crisp!"

By then Venus had reached Stormy and gave her a disarming smile, "you don't want to do that, do you?" she then began emitting green pollen from her hair, "you don't want to hurt me."

Stormy inhaled the pollen, her eyes dilating and her expression going neutral. "I don't want to hurt you," she said in a flat tone as she stepped aside.

"What about the rest of you?" Venus asked, "are you going to try and hurt me?"

"Not that I don't mind you messing with my baby sister," said Darcy, "but I'm gonna have to crush you now."

"*Non !*" shouted Rochelle, "Venus, get away!"

"I said shut up!" snapped Dalton as he slapped Rochelle again.

"Hey, violence never did anyone any good!" said Venus as she released more of her pollen.

"Not this time!" said Darcy. She then summoned three pairs of gas masks that appeared on her head, as well as on Paulette and Dalton, preventing them from breathing in any of the pollen.

"Oh cuttlefish crap!" exclaimed Lagoona.

"If they can't breathe in the pollen, then Venus is done for!" said Draculaura.

"No, she can handle this!" said Rebecca, "trust her!"

"Let's see you hypnotize us now, vegetable girl!" said Paulette as she pulled out a knife. "I'm gonna slice you up and fry you tempura style!"

"Not before I destroy her mind," said Darcy, "I've got just the spell that will turn her brain into jelly!"

"We could do that," said Venus, "or we could do... what the hell is that!?" she exclaimed as she pointed to something behind the three villains. Darcy, Dalton and Paulette looked behind, saw nothing, then turned around to see that Venus had pulled out a 9mm handgun and was aiming it at Darcy.

"Hey, now that's not fair!" said Dalton, "Monsters don't use guns!"

"There comes a time when even Monsters have to pack heat," said Venus in a grim tone full of determination.

At that Darcy laughed cruelly, "you really think that pea shooter can kill me? I got shot twice tonight with a gun that could kill a dragon and I'm still standing!"

"Who said I was using bullets?" Venus asked. She then pulled the trigger, but instead of it shooting a bullet, a stream of bluish green water shot out from the barrel and hit Darcy on the arm.

"What the...? A freaking water pistol?!" exclaimed Darcy, "I ought to... !" but that's as far as she got as she began to cough violently. She ripped off her gas mask and vomited, while the skin on her arm that got wet had turned bright purple.

"You poisoned her!" said Paulette.

"It's just a mild allergic reaction to a rare sap," said Venus. "She'll be fine in a few minutes." She then aimed the special water pistol at Dalton and Paulette, "now, unless you want to puke your guts out too, back away from my friend!"

"Where'd she get that water pistol?" Heath asked, "I want one."

"Probably the same place you got a secret decoder ring," said Jackson, "a box of Cracker Jacks."

"I don't like Cracker Jacks," said Heath, "I keep getting popcorn stuck between my teeth."

"Oh, right," said Jackson, "hey, wait a minute! That was my secret decoder ring! You stole it!"

"Forget ring of secret decoding!" said Abbey, "those bullies are backing off!"

Indeed, Dalton and Paulette were backing away from Rochelle.

"This isn't going to help you, you know," said Dalton, "one way or another, you and your friends are gonna die."

"It seems the opposite is true," said Venus.

"Maybe," said Paulette. She then smiled viciously, "or maybe we're just playing along so that our friend can get behind you!"

Just then Orlando appeared behind Venus. He flicked open his lighter, took a swig of liquid from a small canteen and blew a stream of fire at Venus. She screamed in agony as her clothes burned, as well as her hair and parts of her skin. She fell to the ground to roll out the fire, all the while Orlando, Dalton and Paulette laughed cruelly. Stormy, Darcy and the other Monster Haters quickly recovered from their afflictions and laughed at Venus as well.

"You mangy sacks of gator crap!" shouted Operetta. She then looked at our heroes and allies, an expression of righteous fury on her face,

"ya'll might want to cover your ears for this!"

"Do it if you value your sense of hearing!" said Clawd as he, Draculaura, Cleo, Deuce, Ghoulia, Rebecca, Toralei, Frankie, Clawdeen, Howleen, Abbey, Heath, Lagoona, Lilith, Jackson and Chad, covered their ears, while Gill braced his helmet.

Sora and everyone else covered their ears as well, just as Operetta let out a deafening, sustained note that shattered glass at a distance of 500 yards. Darcy, Stormy, Dalton, Paulette, Orlando and the other Monster Haters, all collapsed to the ground, their ears bleeding.

Operetta's note faded and she inhaled gratefully, "wow! I'll bet they heard that all the way to Atlantic City."

"What impressive pipes you have," said an astonished Max.

"The better to shatter eardrums with, hon," said Operetta as she winked at Max.

Kairi then looked at Aaron, "you may be the best to treat Max and the other Ramblers, but I'll treat my friends." With that she ran towards Rochelle and Venus.

"Kairi! Wait up!" shouted Sora. He, Riku, Tess, Malcolm, as well as Frankie, Clawdeen, Gill, Lagoona, Operetta, Rebecca, Abbey and Heath, ran after her. Aaron, Max, Jill, Steven, Felicia and Julia, ran after them as well,

They all ran past Darcy, Stormy, Paulette, Orlando, Dalton and the other Monster Haters and reached Rochelle and Venus. Rochelle's skin was cracked in several places and bleeding, while Venus was severely burned across half her body.

"Take care of Venus!" Rochelle insisted, "I can wait, she cannot!"

"Right," said Kairi. She then knelt down beside Venus, "just hold on, you'll be fine soon." She then laid her hands on Venus and activated

her healing magic. Within seconds the burns began to disappear and before everyone's eyes, Venus was completely healed.

"Wow! I feel great!" said Venus as she sat up, "like I've just spent a day in the sun, with clean air and water all around."

"Glad to know I made a difference," said Kairi as she helped Venus stand up. She then healed the cracks in Rochelle.

" *Merci, mon amis*," said Rochelle as she stood up.

"I'm just glad you two are alright," said Rebecca.

"And I'm just plain upset," said Clawdeen in an irate tone, "What were you thinking? You could have been killed!"

"We were trying to get an edge over the baddies," said Venus, "it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"And it paid off," said Rochelle, "look, the witches and drug addicts have been subdued."

But when our heroes looked, they saw that Darcy, Stormy, Paulette, Orlando, Dalton and the other Monster Haters were gone.

Sora then saw the baddies heading for the warehouse door, "they're they go!" he shouted.

Just then Lucas burst out from the warehouse and threw a small black sphere. It hit the ground near Jill, Riku, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Operetta. The sphere exploded, releasing a dark purple gas that left Riku, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Operetta coughing and they collapsed to the ground, their strength sapped and they began thrashing in agony, while Jill was apparently unaffected.

"Poison gas!" shouted Malcolm as he used his Keyblade to summon a gust of wind that blew the gas away, leaving Riku, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Operetta weak and in extreme pain.

"Lagoona!" shouted Gill as he rushed to her side, while Frankie reached Clawdee and Rochelle, Venus and Rebecca reached Operetta.

"Riku!" shouted Sora, "say something!"

"Something!" said Riku in a tone barely above a whisper; his skin was pale and clammy, sweat drenching from his brow while his eyes were clouded.

"I've never seen a poison like this," said Aaron as he examined Riku, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Operetta.

"It's dark magic," said Malcolm through gritted teeth.

"Of course it is," said Aaron as he readjusted his scanner, "okay, I think I've got this figured out. Riku, Lagoona and Clawdeen, they aren't in danger."

"I wish I felt the same," said Clawdeen.

"Ditto, mate," said Lagoona.

Operetta tried to say something, but all that came out was a few gasps and coughs.

"She inhaled a bigger dose," said Aaron, "it's paralyzed her vocal cords."

"Oh no!" shouted a horrified Frankie, while Abbey and the other Monsters looked equally appalled.

"Lucas!" shouted Lilith as she and everyone else rushed over, with Clawd and Howleen kneeling beside Clawdeen. Cleo, Deuce, Ghoulia and Draculaura reaching Lagoona and Operetta.

"Lucas, you blood-sucking bastard!" Lilith exclaimed. She then looked at Draculaura, "no offense."

"None taken," said Draculaura.

"Thanks," said Lilith. She then glared at Lucas, whom all this time was smiling vilely at our heroes and allies, "Lucas, you cowardly bastard! Stop this now!"

"Why should I stop?" Lucas asked, "I'm having way too much fun."

"Your idea of fun and mine aren't the same," said Jill as she pulled out a shard of the sphere from her arm.

"Hey, let me look at that," said Kairi.

"Aaron will look at it when he's done with the others," said Jill as she used a handkerchief as a makeshift bandage. She then began swaying about in a disoriented manner, "whoa, I feel floaty!"

"I've got you!" said Max as he caught Jill.

"She's been poisoned as well," said Kairi, "I'm so on this!" with that she began healing Jill, removing the poison from her system. She then did the same for Clawdeen, Lagoona, Operetta and Riku.

"They'll be pretty weak for a while," said Kairi, "but they'll be fine soon."

"I'm feeling fine right now," said Jill as she gently pushed Max away from her.

"Are you sure?" Laura asked, "you've been pretty much through hell tonight."

"I've experienced worse *Bij*," said Jill, "what about the others?"

"I feel like I could sleep through a week's worth of maul discount sales," said Clawdeen.

"Same with me," said Lagoona.

"Now I know they're sick," said Toralei.

"For once, we agree," said Cleo.

"But what about Operetta's voice?" Rebecca asked.

"Her vocal cords are still paralyzed," said Aaron after examining Operetta again, "but it's temporary." he then gave Operetta a reassuring smile, "you'll be bringing down the house again by tomorrow morning."

"Which brings us back to now," said Lilith. She then glared hatefully at Lucas, "this has gone on far enough, Lucas! It's time to end it!"

"It'll end when I say so," said Lucas, "and it won't end until the world is cleansed of the filth of Monsters!"

"And when we have our own hearts desires fulfilled!" said Darcy.

"You just keep saying that!" said Tess as she gave Riku's hand a reassuring squeeze. She then stood up and took out her razor, "I'll skin and stuff you as a trophy!"

"That's not a bad idea," said Lilith, "but I've already decided what to do." She then looked at Felicia, "can I borrow one of your knives?"

"Take your pick," said Felicia as she pulled out several knives; short blades, long blades, throwing knives, switchblades, survival knives and a lot of wickedly curved and seriated blades.

"Good grief, girl!" said Clawd, "where do you keep them all?"

"I'd tell you," said Felicia as Lilith selected a simple double edged knife, "but then I'd have to kill you." She then flicked her wrists and her knives vanished.

"Thanks," said Lilith. She then looked at Heath and Abbey, "I need you to burn a circle in the grass, fifteen feet in diameter. I'll explain why afterwards."

"Uh... okay," said Heath. He then shot a stream of flames at an empty patch of grass, burning a circle fifteen feet wide. Abbey then extinguished the flames with an ice beam once the grass had burned away, leaving a circle of burned ground.

"What are you doing, Lilith?" Lucas asked as Lilith stepped into the circle.

"You should know," said Lilith, "you created this ritual when we were still friends." She then used the knife to cut her palm, allowing blood to drop onto the ground, "Lucas Vega, I challenge you to a Knife Edged Death-Match!"

At that all our heroes and allies were stunned into silence, while the baddies were also left speechless.

But then Eliza appeared next to Lucas, laughing like the lunatic she was. "Oh, that's great, you really are a funny girl, Lilith," she said after her fit of insidious giggles subsided, "imagine, you, challenging Lucas, the chosen one, to a fight to the finish. You really are funny."

"Who said I was being funny?" Lilith asked in a deadly serious tone, "Lucas knows the ritual, he made it up before he first took Soma."

"I remember," said Lucas, "the idea was a means of deciding who should lead. But there's no question as to the position of leadership. I am he who shall lead humanity in a glorious revolution against the taint of Monsters. I am he who shall cleanse the world and create an empire so bright, so beautiful, it will be the envy of the world."

"Yeah, that sounds real nice and happy," said Darcy, "so nice and happy, it's sickening."

"But what's this about a knife fight?" Stormy asked.

"It's not exactly a knife fight," said Paulette, "the knives are stuck into the ground with plenty of blade still exposed. Both fighters take off their right shoes and place their feet against the edge of the knives

and duke it out with just their fists. First one to fall down backwards cuts their foot and bleeds to death, while if they fall face forward, the other takes the knife and kills the fallen one."

"And this is how you figured on deciding leadership disputes!?" an exasperated Tess asked, "you guys are freaking daffy!"

"Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time," said Lilith, "I wasn't thinking right back then. But my mind is clear now," she then looked at the assembled Monster Haters, "and it's clear to me that you've all been corrupted by Lucas's insanity! Most of you were there when he first took Soma! You saw how out of control he was, how irrational and downright mad he became because of the drug. Now you're following him down the same vortex he's riding. But it doesn't have to be that way."

At that Eliza laughed viciously, "oh yeah, right, like you could do better? You don't even take Soma-99!"

"I don't need Soma or any of its variants," said Lilith, "I achieved my own power all by myself, without getting high. I've also shrugged off the old prejudices that have kept Humans and Monsters divided for too long. I've turned my back on fear, hate and ignorance and become a better person because of it."

"You mean you're weak!" snapped Dalton, "where as we who follow Lucas, we are the strong!"

"Only the strong have the right to lead the revolution!" said Paulette, "only the strong have the right to rule a world free of the filth of freaks and mutants!"

"You're mutating yourselves as we speak!" shouted Aaron. He held up his cell phone, "I just heard from the labs in Washington. That strange blood sample we took back at the first warehouse, it was from one of the Monster Haters."

"So one of you did get cut," said Toralei smugly, "I'll bet it was from one of my scratches," she then eyed her talons.

"Actually, there was traces of werewolf saliva," said Aaron.

"I bit one of them," said Howleen.

"You what!?" exclaimed Clawd, "you bit a Normie!"

"Is this true, Ms. Wolf?" Patricia asked in a serious tone, "did you bite a human?"

"He was going to kill my sister!" said Howleen, "I had to do something."

"Anything but biting a Normie," said Deuce.

At that Ghoulia moaned something in the form of a question.

"She didn't swallow any blood," said Clawdeen, "at least that's what she told me."

"And I didn't," said Howleen, "nor would I want to," she then glared at Lucas, "you guys have rotten blood!"

"Our blood is pure!" snapped Orlando.

"I think not," said Aaron, "but I'll get to that in a moment," he then looked at Howleen, "are you sure you didn't ingest any human blood?"

"I spat it all out, then rinsed with water and club soda," said Howleen, "believe me, I didn't swallow a drop."

Aaron then examined Howleen's eyes, "no sign of pigment change in your iris's, that's usually the first sign of a Monster being corrupted by bloodlust."

"And her mind is free of homicidal thoughts," said Laura, "except for wanting to kill the junkies and witches, which can be attributed to righteous fury. But other than that, her mind is clean."

"Thanks," said Howleen. She then frowned, "now stay out of my mind!"

"So, my sister's not going to go crazy?" Clawdeen asked, "you're not going to have to put her down before she hurts someone?"

"The only people that'll have to worry about Howleen hurting someone is those maniacs over there," said Patricia as she pointed at Lucas, his followers and The Trix.

"It'd be wise to keep Howleen under close watch for another day or so to be safe," said Aaron, "but yes, Howleen is going to be alright."

"Yes, that's all well and done," said an impatient Jill, "but can we get down to why we're really here?" She then glared at Darcy and Stormy, "where's Violet!? Tell me or I'll make you tell me!"

"And you'd better give back Clair!" shouted Jackson.

"You want them?" Darcy asked, "come and get them!"

"Don't bother," said Shawn, "they're not here."

"What?!" exclaimed both Jill and Jackson.

"They were here," said Shawn, "but I sense that they were moved not too long ago. It'll be awhile before I can Track them again."

"In the meantime," said Lilith, "we can settle this feud between me and my old friends," she then held out her cut hand and made a fist, causing a few more drops of blood to fall onto the ground, "I will say it again; I challenge you, Lucas Vega, to a Knife Edge Death-Match! Winner leads the group to whatever fate holds for them."

"As if Lucas would ever accept a challenge from you, traitor!" snapped Dalton.

"Weakling! Monster-lover!" shouted Orlando.

"We should all kill you here and now for your blasphemy!" said Paulette.

"They're getting into religion now?" Darcy asked, "and I thought they were crazy before."

"It was your idea to team up with them in the first place," Stormy muttered.

"You're dreaming if you think Lucas will even think of accepting this mockery of a challenge!" said Orlando, "even if he did, you wouldn't last one minute!"

"I want to hear Lucas's answer myself!" shouted Lilith, "you all have been speaking for him, but he hasn't said anything." She glared at Lucas, while taking some of her blood and wiping it under her eyes, "this is the third time I have to ask you, Lucas. I challenge you to a Knife Edge Death Match! According to your own rules, if you refuse me a third time, you'll be forever marked as a coward! Is that what you want? For your followers to know you as a coward who cannot even accept or decline his own challenges?"

At that Lucas glared hatefully at Lilith, "no one calls me a coward and lives!" he spat, "I accept your challenge, Lilith von Hellscream!" he then pulled out his own knife as he walked into the circle, cut his hand and spilled some blood onto the ground. He then stuck the knife into the ground less than a meter from Lilith's. The two of them then removed their right footwear and began stretching, preparing for the fight to come.

"Now I understand," said J.D., "Lilith already has this won."

"I don't get it," said Sora.

"Neither do I," said Frankie, "Lilith already fought with Lucas and it was like he was just playing with her back then. He could have destroyed her if he wanted to."

"But he did not destroy Lilith," said Abbey, "and I think Lilith was holding back power of her own."

"She was holding back," said Chad, "I've seen her workout. Trust me, she's more powerful than she's lead us to believe."

"You've been spying on her?" Heath asked.

At that Chad blushed slightly, "I... kinda have a crush on her, so yeah, I am spying on her. When she's working out in the gym, practicing her martial arts, using the cardio and weight machines and now she's started gymnastics, she's a thing of beauty."

"And she's lethal," said Max as he watched Lilith stretch, "I know a trained killer when I see one."

"Just how long have you been spying on her?" Cleo asked.

"And how come she never figured it out?" Howleen asked.

"A while," said Chad, "and I don't know how I've been so lucky for so long. She'd break my neck if she found out I was such a pervert, but I can't help it, she's so beautiful, I just have to see her."

"How much of a pervert are you?" an irate Clawdeen asked.

"Not a big one!" Chad insisted, "I don't go around stealing her underwear, and I'm not taking photos of her in the showers if that's what you think! But," he blushed more heavily now, "I have gotten close enough to know that she's a natural blond."

At that all the boys grinned, while all the girls glared angrily at Chad.

"We'll talk about your intercessions later," said an annoyed Patricia, "I do believe that the two competitors are about to begin their fight to

the finish."

... Hogwarts...

"You see, Jill?" Andrew asked, "things are turning out differently. Felicia should be dead by now, while you should have been laid up by the poison and in the hospital for a week."

"But not this time," said Max, "thanks to Sora and his friends, a lot less of our friends are going to die."

"Assuming they can end it before anything else happens," said Hermione.

"You're worried about that Knife Edge Death-Match, aren't you," said Roxas.

"It's barbaric and totally unnecessary," said Hermione.

"But it might be able to end it with just one more death," said J.D., "if young Ms. Von Hellscream can prove to the followers of Lucas Vega that he is only human, they may indeed abandon their support of him."

"There's still The Trix to deal with," said Naminé, "and we don't know where Violet, Clair or the book is."

"Give Shawn a chance, he'll find them," said Andrew.

"You really are accepting him as your future son in law," said Jill.

"And if my guess is right," said Andrew, "the other Violet is going to fall head over heels for the other Shawn."

"He still has to find her," said Harry as he and Aaron came back into the room.

"How's Aiden?" Roxas asked.

"That kid has a remarkable recovery rate," said Aaron, "he was completely exhausted, but by the time we got him to the hospital wing, he was rapidly regaining his stamina. He'll be fully recovered by the time Ashley is ready with the portal projector, if not sooner."

"Thank goodness for that," said Naminé.

"We're not out of the woods yet," said Max, "the fight is about to begin."

... Manhattan... outside St. Vincent's Hospital...

Lilith and Lucas had finished stretching. They then stood facing each other less than a meter apart, placing the soles of their right feet against the blades of their knives.

"You really must want me dead to want to do this," said Lucas, "but do you really have what it takes to kill me?"

"We won't know if I don't try," said Lilith, "then again, I just have to knock you down long enough for the others to see that you're not some dark messiah. I just need them to see the light of reason once more and you'll be finished."

"I'm afraid the only reason my followers see is the reason of me," said Lucas, "and don't think that your death will be quick. I'll be aiming to knock you down face forward. No quick exsanguinations for you. I fully intend to make you suffer long and deep before you give up the ghost."

"Speaking of which, mind of my friend records this?" Lilith asked. She then shouted, "you recording, Spectra!?"

"Every second!" said Spectra as she filmed the two fighters squaring off against each other, "this will make headlines around the world!"

"One way or another, the truth of your madness will get out," said Lilith, "face it, Lucas! You've lost, you crazy bastard!"

Lucas answered with his fist as he swung a right hook at Lilith. She blocked it, then responded with a right jab to Lucas's face, hitting him in the jaw. He endured the blow and countered with a left hook, which Lilith blocked and countered with another face punch. This set a pattern for the fight, with Lucas's punches being blocked and all of Lilith's punches getting through. Yet none of Lilith's punches were inflicting significant damage.

"I don't know if she's winning or not," said Sora.

"I think I get it," said Kairi, "but... no, wait I don't."

"She's using more of her brains than brawns," said Malcolm.

"Exactly," said Max, "Lilith is still holding back, but she's wearing Lucas out first."

"He's still juiced up on the drug," said Aaron, "but can't take any more without opening himself up to further attacks. If Lilith can hold her own long enough, she'll be able to overwhelm him just as he's coming down from his high."

"A perfect example of strategy over brutality," said Solaris.

"I almost forgot you were here," said Katina.

"I'm used to being ignored, more or less," said Solaris.

After a few minutes, Lucas showed signs of the drug effects fading. His punches were slowing down and weren't as forceful, while at the same time he was beginning to sweat and breathe harder.

At the same time, Lilith began punching harder and faster, finally cutting and bruising Lucas's face and disrupting his balance.

"A few more good hits and he'll fall down!" said Clawd.

"You can do it, Lilith!" Lagoona.

"Ghouls, it's time for an impromptu cheer!" said Cleo.

"I was thinking just the same thing," said Clawdeen.

"Come on, ghoul friends!" said Frankie as she, Clawdeen, Draculaura and Cleo, all stood in a line.

"Ready!" said Draculaura.

"OK!" shouted the four of them, **"One! Two! Three! Four! Lilith's gonna wipe the floor! Five! Six! Seven Eight! Lucas's gonna be sedate!"**

"That's fear leading?" Kairi asked.

"It's the best we could come up with on such short notice," said Draculaura.

"It's over, Lucas!" Lilith shouted after delivering a vicious right cross that nearly knocked him on his back, yet he still maintained his balance. Both fighters's feet were bleeding slightly from the constant pressure on the knives.

"It's only over when I say it's over!" shouted Lucas. He then flicked his wrist and threw something into Lilith's face, something that burst and released gray powder right into her eyes. Lilith winced and clutched her eyes, desperately rubbing them to clear the powder.

But then she was tackled by a manically giggling Eliza, knocking her onto her side. Orlando, Paulette and Dalton rushed in and the four of them began beating Lilith to a pulp.

"You cheating bastards!" shouted Julia as she aimed her double barreled rifle at Dalton and pulled the trigger. The massive bullet was right on target, but was stopped by an energy barrier.

"No more shooting for you!" shouted Darcy as she changed the force field, making it send the bullet right back at Julia. She ducked in time to avoid being shot, but then she had to jump back as a Neo Shadow appeared before her, followed by hundreds more.

"I knew The Heartless were in on this!" snapped Tess as she, Sora and Malcolm summoned their Keyblades. The three of them hacked, slashed and stabbed the dark creatures, while around them, their allies were fighting as well.

Max was ripping the Neo Shadows apart, while Steven was bashing them into oblivion with his metal staff. Julia was shooting them with her pistols, while Felicia was slicing them up with her knives. Shawn, Laura and Katina were blasting them with psychic attacks, Mark and Jill were hacking them up with their swords, while Patricia and the others from The Bureau were supplying firing support from the side, protecting Riku, Lagoona, Clawdeen and Operetta, along with Chad, Jackson and Ghoulia.

Frankie was zapping with her electricity, Toralei, Clawd and Howleen were slicing the Neo Shadows apart with their talons, Gill was punching and kicking. Deuce was petrifying with his eyes, Heath and Abbey were burning and freezing, Venus, Rochelle and Rebecca were also punching and kicking, while Spectra was hovering above, filming the brawl with her digital camera.

All this time, Paulette, Dalton, Orlando and Eliza were continuing to beat up Lilith, delivering massively damaging punches and kicks that left her cut, bruised and broken.

Lucas had administered another dose of Soma-99 and was fully healed. He then glared at his followers, "Get her up!"

Dalton and Orlando hauled Lilith to her feet, while Paulette grabbed Lilith's hair to hold her head up. Lilith's face was black and blue all over, her left eye was swollen shut and blood was running from her nose and lips.

"Oh, why so glum?" Eliza asked, "turn that frown upside down!" she then forced Lilith's mouth into a smile, exposing several broken teeth.

"Okay, you've got her," said Stormy, "now finish her off so we can get out of here."

"By now Icy's gotten things set up," said Darcy, "all we've got to do is get the book away from Violet and wait for Quantummad666."

"You can leave if you want to," said Lucas, "but I've got a score to settle." He then walked towards the restrained Lilith, "you shouldn't have rejected me, Lilith von Hellscream. So now you must pay the price."

"Oh, let me do it, Lucas," said Eliza in a deranged tone. She then pulled out one of the knives stuck in the ground, "let me cut her heart out. I want to feel its final beats."

"Oh, just kill her already!" said Stormy in an annoyed tone, "we've got to perform the ritual before the sun comes up!"

"We've got plenty of time," said Lucas, "and like I said, if you wish to, you may take your leave. Eliza, you can play with her heart after she's dead."

"But I want to cut her heart out!" whined Eliza.

At that, Lilith spat a mouthful of blood and tooth fragments right into Eliza's face, "you can have my heart when hell freezes over!" she shouted.

Eliza wiped the bloody and toothy mess from her face, then stabbed Lilith in the heart. "Keep it!" she snapped.

"Oh my god!" shouted Steven, "they killed Lilith!"

"You bastards!" shouted Julia as she aimed one of her pistols at Eliza, but the gun clicked empty.

"I almost forgot about them," said Lucas, "Dalton, Orlando, take care of the mutants and freaks. Paulette, grab Eliza."

"With pleasure," said Paulette. She grabbed Eliza by the shoulders, while Dalton and Orlando released Lilith. She fell to the ground and lay there like a sack of potatoes.

"Don't think I'll let this go, Eliza," said Lucas, "you defied me, therefore, you must be punished."

"She spat on me!" Eliza snapped, "she spat on me!"

"And you killed her when I said not to!" shouted Lucas, "I should kill you for that! But I won't, not now. Instead, I'll just cut you off."

Paulette then grabbed Eliza's vials of Soma-99 from her pocket and smashed them to the ground.

"My go-juice!" shouted Eliza as she fell to her knees and tried to lick up the spilled Soma-99.

"How pathetic can you get?" Stormy asked.

"It's times like this that make me glad that I'm only semi-crazy," said Darcy.

"She's still useful to the cause," said Lucas, "I'll keep her until she's no longer necessary." he then glared at Dalton and Orlando, "why are you still standing around here? Go kill some mutants and freaks!"

"Uh, we'd like to, Lucas," said Dalton, "but..."

"We've got a problem," said Orlando. He pointed up, where hovering next to Spectra, was a man in a blue and white suit of futuristic armor, loaded with high powered machineguns and rockets.

By now Sora and the other heroes had defeated all the Neo Shadows and had seen the hovering armored man.

"What is that?" Malcolm asked.

"That's my brother!" said a happily smiling Aaron, "that's Tyler!"

"Suck on this!" shouted Tyler. He then opened fire with his machineguns and rockets, unleashing a massive barrage of laser guided lead and explosives on the villains. In the first ten seconds of the onslaught, five Monster Haters were cut to pieces and blown up, the bullets and rockets dealing fatal damage to their bodies before the drugs in their systems could heal them.

Lucas, Paulette, Orlando, Dalton and Eliza barely avoided being perforated as Tyler turned his machineguns on them, while Darcy and Stormy flew up to avoid a salvo of rockets.

"You wanna play rough!" Stormy asked, "fine by me!" she then sent a bolt of dark lighting at Tyler, but his armor absorbed the energy and discharged it to the ground. He then turned his machineguns and more rockets on the two witches, forcing them to fly for their lives, barely avoiding the bullets and rockets by inches.

"I think we've done enough for now!" said Darcy.

"For once I won't argue with you," said Lucas, "let's get out of here!"

Darcy and Stormy then cast a double teleportation spell, causing them and the remaining Monster Haters to vanish.

"What a finish!" exclaimed Spectra as she and Tyler landed, with her hovering a few inches over the ground.

Tyler removed his helmet and grinned at our heroes and allies, "sorry I was late, my flight system needed to be debugged."

"You may have saved us," said Rochelle, "but for one of us, I fear it may be too late."

Everyone then ran towards Lilith, whom was laying on the ground, her eyes fully dilated and empty.

"She... she can't be dead," said Chad in a distant tone as he fell to his knees.

"Dude, she is," said Deuce. He then turned his head to hide the fact that he was crying behind his sunglasses.

"Lilith helped bring Monsters and Normies together back home," said Frankie as she and the rest of her friends began to cry, "she... she was special."

"And my equal in fashion trends," said Cleo as she allowed her tears to fall from her eyes, spoiling her makeup, "but her death shall not be in vain! She died trying to stop a great evil and she will be remembered for it! I shall see to it that her body is preserved, mummified like the kings and queens of old Egypt. She shall be buried with the full honors of a Pharaoh! So let it be written! So shall it be done!"

"I hate to put a damper on your funeral plans," said Kairi, "but she's still alive."

"Barely," said Aaron as he examined Lilith, "if we can get her to the hospital in time, I might be able to save her."

"No, wait," said Katina as she pushed her way past the rest of our heroes and allies. "Pull the knife out."

"What?!" exclaimed Aaron. He then stood up and glared at her with an outraged expression, "Katina Jones! Have you lost your thrice-damned mind!? If I pull the knife out, it'll kill her for sure!"

"She'll die if you leave it in!" said Katina, "she will live if you pull it out, I've seen it!"

"Another of your faulty visions?" Felicia asked.

"Shut up!" snapped Katina, "I may have been wrong a lot tonight, but I'll stake my head on this vision. If I'm wrong, Max has my permission

to shoot me."

"I'd rather not hold you to it," said Max.

"Whatever you're going to do," said Malcolm, "you'd better do it fast."

"She's not going to last much longer," said Lagoona.

"Someone make a decision!" Draculaura exclaimed.

"Pull it out," said Frankie, "call me crazy, but I trust Katina on this. Don't ask me why, but, I do."

"I can tell that you honestly believe it with all your heart," said Laura, "and that's reason enough for me." She then used her powers to psychically pull the knife out.

"God Damn It!" exclaimed an almost hysterical Aaron, "what is wrong with you people! She's dead for sure now!"

"No, she's not!" said Kairi, "look!"

Everyone looked and to their amazement, Lilith's wounds were healing on their own. Bones were mending, bruises were fading, blood vessels were repaired and lost blood was replenished. Within seconds, Lilith was completely healed. She sat up, slightly disoriented but otherwise completely healthy.

"What... what happened?" she asked as Kairi helped her stand up, "I... I was almost dead there."

"But you didn't die," said Katina as she gave Lilith a reassuring smile, "nor will you ever, or rather, you're very hard to kill from now on."

"Of course," said an astonished Max, "she's like me now; indestructible."

"I'm what?" Lilith asked.

"You're a Meta Human, Lilith," said Patricia, "you have the same healing factor as Max."

"Cellular regeneration," said Aaron, "of course! Max's power woke up when he was 13, when he nearly died from being run over by a car. Lilith had to come within an inch of death for her power to be fully realized."

"So, does that mean I get a tan jacket too?" Lilith asked, "'cause a lot of Meta humans work in The Bureau."

"We'll talk about it later," said Patricia. "Right now, we've got to find out where the enemy has Clair and Violet."

"I'm afraid the mission is over, Deputy Director Walker," said Solaris as she stood next to Frankie. Solaris then wiped out a jet injector and inoculated Frankie in her left arm.

"What the... !" exclaimed Frankie as she looked at Solaris with shocked eyes. She then passed out into Solaris's arms.

"What the hell are you doing!?" exclaimed Clawdeen as she struggled to her feet.

"Sorry to lie to everyone," said Solaris as she pulled out her cell phone, "but you've all been had. I'll see you in the new world order!" she then pressed a button on her cell phone and she vanished with Frankie.

There was a moment of stunned silence as our heroes and allies tried to figure out what happened.

Katina finally broke the silence, "I did not see this coming."

"Ain't that the truth," said Tess.

... Hogwarts...

"I did not see that coming," said a shocked Ron, while everyone else watching looked equally stunned.

"I won't argue with that, Weasley," said Draco.

... Castle Oblivion...

"I certainly didn't see that coming," said Dio Brando.

"Neither did I," said Regina.

... Someplace underground...

Solaris and the unconscious Frankie materialized in a stone chamber far beneath the stars. The chamber was half as big as a football field, the walls illuminated by guttering torches and carved with otherworldly runes. The floor was equally inscribed with runes, while the center of the chamber had a large stone altar with multiple torches around it. A smaller stone altar was next to it.

Lucas and his followers were around the stone altar, talking with Icy, Darcy and Stormy, while off to one side, still in their energy cages was Clair and Violet. They all looked at the sudden entrance of Solaris and Frankie.

"Oh don't be so surprised," said Solaris as she dragged Frankie towards the middle of the room and threw her down in front of the altar, "you've been expecting me. Isn't that right," she looked at Lucas, "Killerfist819?" then at Icy, "Frostqueen70?"

"Quantummad666, I presume?" Icy asked in a cautious tone.

"In the flesh," said Solaris, "I'm so glad you made good use of both Soma-99 and my faux Gloomix."

"Yeah, both stuff turned out pretty okay," said Stormy.

Just then Frankie regained consciousness, "what... what happened? Where am I?"

"You are right where you're supposed to be, Frankie," said Solaris, "your destiny is at hand. You, Frankie Stein, are to be the third and final sacrifice that shall summon Yog-Sothoth!"

"I'd say welcome to the club," said Clair, "but then I'd be lying."

The end of chapter 7.

Next chapter finds Frankie, Clair and Violet in dire straits, only to find out just whom is betraying whom. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

Double Revelation

Last time found our heroes and allies on the verge of rescuing Violet and Clair from The Trix and Monster Haters. However, Icy and Lucas knew the rescuers were coming so she moved Violet, Clair and The Necronomicon to a third location where the ritual to summon Yog-Sothoth is to take place. Sora and the others fought against The Monster Haters, Darcy and Stormy, leading to a one on one death match between Lilith and Lucas, which Lucas cheated and Lilith wound up stabbed in the heart and the enemy escaping yet again. But Lilith survived her mortal wound and recovered within seconds. It was then confirmed that Lilith is a Meta Human with the same healing factor as Max Kildare. But then things were turned upside down when Solaris Pretorius grabbed Frankie and teleported out, arriving at the location of the sacrifice and revealing herself as the third partner in the dark triad. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 8: Double Revelation

... Outside St. Vincent's Hospital...

"What the hell just happened?" Patricia asked.

"Isn't it obvious, boss?" Julia asked, "we've been betrayed!" She then shouted as loud as she could, "BETRAYAL! BETRAYAL! BETRAYED US! THAT WOMAN IS EVIL! EVIL!"

"How did this happen?" Laura asked, "I should have been able to sense any dark intent coming at us, so why didn't I sense Solaris?"

"She must have been shielding her mind," said Katina.

"That and the fact that she's a respective associate of The Bureau," said J.D.

"Not anymore," said an irate Max, "no one betrays The Bureau and gets away with it!"

"I'll cut her liver out!" shouted Felicia.

"I'll cut her spleen out!" shouted Mark.

"I'll cut her vas deferens out!" shouted Jill.

"Uh, Jill?" Aaron said cautiously, "girl's don't have vas deferens's."

"Oh, right, sorry," said Jill, "but I'll still kill the bitch!"

"Why are you focusing on revenge?!" exclaimed Draculaura, "we have to find Frankie!"

"We'll find her when we find Solaris," said Clawd.

"Just wait till I get my strength back," said Clawdeen, "I'll rip her eyes out and make her eat them!"

"Save the rest of her face for me," said Toralei, "no one kidnaps Frankie and gets away with it!"

"Oh, you're only saying that because Frankie promised you money," said an annoyed Clawdeen.

"What's this now?" Cleo asked.

"It's nothing," said Toralei, "forget about it."

"No, don't forget about it, Cleo," said Clawdeen as she tried to get up, but needed help from Howleen and Clawd to do so, "you want the truth? Here it is. Frankie promised Toralei \$500 if she promised to be civil to Kairi."

"And I've kept my end of the bargain," said Toralei. She then looked at Kairi, "I have been nice to you, right?"

"Well, you haven't been mean," said Kairi, "but to be frank, if you're only interested in saving Frankie just so you can collect money from her, then you might as well go home here and now."

"There's no place for selfish motives in a crisis of this magnitude," said Max.

"So if you really are after money, then go away!" said Sora.

"Hey, Frankie's my friend too!" said Toralei.

"You don't even like her!" said Lagoona, "you don't like any of us!"

"Every thing you've done at Monster High has been for your own selfish desires," said Cleo.

"And you are just plain mean," said Abbey.

At that Toralei looked like she wanted to say something insulting, but she could find the words. Instead, she began crying.

"I think you girls really hurt her," said Clawd.

"They did hurt her!" said Laura, "I've seen into her mind and heart." She then looked at Spectra, "and seen her short biography online. Nice editing."

"Oh, glad you liked it," said Spectra.

"I've also seen into Toralei's mind and heart," said Katina, "yes, Toralei Stripe has inflicted a fair amount of misery and suffering on her fellow students."

"More than fair amount, thank you much," said Abbey.

"Alright, she's a total bitch," said Katina, "but that doesn't make her evil."

"She's just a product of a childhood full of strife, struggle and suffering," said Laura, "I'm not excusing her misdeeds, but she deserves a chance to change."

"There is good in your heart, Toralei Stripe," said Katina, "but you have to be the one to accept it. You have to be willing to change for the better. Only you can choose to walk in the light or the dark."

"You can still be bad," said Sora, "but in a good way."

"We happen to be on good terms with some awesomely bad witches," said Riku as Tess helped him stand up.

"There are good witches?" Draculaura asked.

"Of course there's good witches," said Tess, "what, you think they're all as rotten as The Trix?"

"Well, they have left us a really bad example," said Deuce.

At that Malcolm looked at Deuce irately, "my big sister is a witch, and she's the most kind, generous and downright good person I know."

"Oh, sorry," said Deuce, "didn't mean to insult your sister."

"Well, Carmen and her friends are good but can be bad if they want to," said Riku.

"The same thing applies to you, Toralei Stripe," said Katina, "you can still be bad ass, so long as you keep the light in your heart strong."

"And be nice for a change!" said Heath. "Try completing people instead of putting them down. Help instead of hurt. Find the kind."

"Wow, Heath," said an impressed Gill, "that's actually really smart of you."

"Yeah, I surprise myself sometimes," said Heath.

"Well, Toralei?" Clawdeen asked, "you staying or going?"

"I'm staying," said Toralei, "mostly because I promised to rescue Clair, and I will keep that promise. I also want to save Frankie, Violet,

get back The Necronomicon and stop the baddies."

"And collect your money from Frankie," said Jackson.

"It'd be great if I could," said Toralei. "Look, you all can still hate me after this, but for now all I want to do is get this over with, without anyone else dieing."

"She's telling the truth," said Katina, while Laura nodded in agreement.

"Thanks," said Toralei. She then frowned at the two espers, "now stay out of my head!"

"Well, if two of the most powerful psychics in the world are willing to trust Toralei," said Cleo, "then I'll give her the benefit of the doubt."

One by one the other Monsters nodded in agreement, with Clawdeen being the last.

"Alright, I'll trust you, Toralei," said Clawdeen, "but you'd better be sincere about this, or else."

"Or else you'll end me, yes, I remember," said Toralei, "Now that we're all back on good terms, what do we do next?"

"We find our enemies and tear them new ones!" shouted Steven, while Mark, Julia and Felicia shouted in agreement.

"Easier said than done," said Shawn, "I have to start all over in my Tracking of Clair and Violet, and now Frankie, if someone would loan me something personal of hers."

"She dropped her I-Coffin," said Lagoon as she picked up Frankie's phone and handed it to Shawn.

Just then Patricia received an email that made her grind her teeth in frustration, "they couldn't have sent this earlier?!" she shouted, "like before we were stabbed in the back by that two-faced bitch!?"

"Now what?" Aaron asked.

"Not too long ago," said Patricia, "Internal Affairs back in Bureau H.Q. received an anonymous tip about Solaris Pretorius. They hacked her personal files and her home computer and found the formula for Soma-99."

"So she perfected the drug!" said Lilith.

"And crafted those power-boosting items The Trix are wearing," said Patricia, "she's been in communication with Icy and Lucas, the three of them using a private chat room to coordinate their movements. Solaris also copied the security plans for the gala."

"No wonder they were able to walk all over us at the museum," said an irate Felicia, "that bitch has been playing us for fools!"

"She's got to pay!" said Julia, while Steven and Mark shouted in agreement.

"We've still got to find her," said Malcolm.

"And we will," said Jill as she cleaned her saber, "we will. I don't know how, but we will."

... Hogwarts...

Just then, Albus burst into the room, "It's finished!" he shouted, "the portal projector is finished!"

"Finally!" shouted Roxas. He, Naminé and Tara ran out of the room, with Harry, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, Max, Jill, Leon and Aaron right behind them.

The finished portal projector in The Great Hall was similar in design to the machine Ansem put together back on Radiant Garden, but this

version was much bigger, bulkier and slightly less advanced than the design Quistis provided from the SeeD databanks.

"I'm programming it right now," said Ashley as she typed into a laptop linked to the machine, "give me another five minutes and it'll be ready."

"I'm ready to go when you are," said Aiden as he walked into the Great Hall, with a worried Madam Pomfrey right behind him.

"You shouldn't be out of bed yet," said Madam Pomfrey, "you're still recovering from your horrific exertion."

"I'm perfectly fine," said Aiden, "fit as a fiddle and fancy free!"

"I don't care how fit you think you are," said an annoyed Madam Pomfrey, "in my professional opinion, you are not fit to partake in any strenuous activities! I insist that you return to the Hospital Wing at once!"

"I respect your opinion as a healer, Madam Pomfrey," said Aiden, "but my friends need me. I'm going and there's nothing you can do to change my mind."

"I can restrain you!" said Madam Pomfrey as she pulled out her wand.

But then Professor McGonagall pulled out her wand, "Poppy! I won't have you restrain a guest of this school against his will!"

"He's not a student," said Angelina, whom had arrived with Cho and Neville, "none of us have any real authority over him or his friends."

"And he's refusing treatment, despite being a minor," said Aaron, "we can't help him if he doesn't want to, it's against medical ethics. I'm sorry, Poppy, but there's nothing you can do to stop him. Besides, he is perfectly healthy." He then looked at Aiden, "you've got a recovery

factor rivaling Max Kildare. Of course, you're nowhere near as indestructible as Max, but you can recover your stamina just as fast."

"Really?" Aiden asked, "I never thought about it that way." He then looked at Max, "maybe we're related somehow."

"Maybe," said Max, "maybe."

Just then Hezekiah and Jana walked into the room, "we're ready to go," said Jana.

"We'll show those dark witches and drug addicts that they can't mess with The Bureau," said Hezekiah, "even if it is an alternate version."

"Speaking of alternate versions," said Leon as he pulled out a letter, "would you mind giving this to my counterpart?"

"Are you mad!?" exclaimed Hermione, "sending a message to your past self? You'll risk altering the flow of history."

"You're one to talk," said Ron, "remember when you and Harry saved Sirius and Buckbeak?"

"I thought we made it clear that this isn't the past, but an alternate reality," said Leon, "events are playing out similar to what we went through, but events are changing from what we remembered." He then looked at Max and Jill, "if I'm right, we may have an opportunity to help our other selves, to help them make the right choices and avoid some of our more unpleasant mistakes."

"You know, that's not a bad idea," said Max, while Jill nodded in agreement.

"Give us a minute," said Jill as she felt her pockets, "oh, dash it all, where's a pen when you need one!?"

"Here," said Andrew as he pulled out a pad of notepaper and two pens.

"Why do you have two pens?" Tara asked.

"In case I lose one or one runs out of ink," said Andrew, while Max and Jill hastily wrote letters to their counterparts.

"You've always been a boy scout," said Aaron.

"Were you a boy scout?" Neville asked.

"No," said Andrew, "but I was always prepared."

Max and Jill finished their letters and handed them to Roxas and Naminé, "we'll make sure your other selves get these," said Roxas.

"Thanks," said Max, "hopefully, this will make the next few years of my counterpart a bit less miserable."

"And help my other self overcome her grief," said Jill, "she may have found new love in Violet, Klaus and Sunny, but she's still mourning for her Andrew."

"If my other self were still alive in that world," said Andrew, "I'd tell him to stay away from conch, it's the one food I truly regret cooking."

"Yeah, that was a disaster," said Max, while Jill, Leon and Aaron nodded in agreement.

"It's finished!" Ashley shouted triumphantly, "I am a genius! Plain and simple!"

"Oi! We put the blasted thing together!" said Scorpio.

"And Aiden made the parts," said Rose.

"But it was my idea in the first place," said Ashley, "so I get all the kudos." She then laughed, "just kidding!"

"You Americans sure have a strange sense of humor," said Izzy.

Aiden, Roxas, Naminé., Tara, Jana and Hezekiah all said their goodbyes to Harry, Max and everyone else, while receiving wishes of good luck.

Ashley then activated the machine and a portal was opened.

"We'll be back with our friends!" Tara shouted to her fellow witches and wizards, "I swear it!"

"Kick some dark witch ass!" shouted Izzy.

"Will do!" said Aiden. With that he, Roxas, Naminé., Tara, Jana and Hezekiah stepped through the portal, which closed up after them.

"You wanted to go with them," said Ginny to Harry, "I know you wanted it."

"Not just me," said Harry, "we all could have gone. We all could have made a difference."

"It's a shame your days of being the hero are pretty much over, Potter," said Draco, "I'll bet you'll lose sleep over failing to grasp more glory."

"Father," said an annoyed Scorpio, "I know that you and Mr. Potter have a lot of bad blood between you, but please, for God's sake, stop being such an asshole!"

"Scorpio!" exclaimed a shocked Draco, "how dare you use such language in front of me! Where did you learn that word?! Tell me!"

"Aunt Daphne," said Scorpio, "that's what she calls you in front of Mother whenever you're not around."

"I'm going to have to talk with your Aunt Daphne soon," said an irate Draco.

... Manhattan, outside St. Vincent's Hospital...

The portal opened up, spilling Aiden, Roxas, Naminé., Tara, Jana and Hezekiah onto the ground, the six of them landing on top of each other, with Aiden on the bottom.

"Oww!" Jana exclaimed, "I fell on my keys."

"Those are my keys you fell on," said Aiden as they picked themselves up.

"Aiden!" exclaimed Sora. Aiden and the others looked and saw Sora running towards them, followed by Tess, Patricia, Max, Cleo and everyone else.

Aiden, Roxas, Naminé. and Tara were warmly embraced by Sora, Riku, Tess and Malcolm, then introduced to the Bureau agents and the Monsters, while also filled in on the situation. They also were reintroduced to Kairi, with Riku coming up with the aliases 'Alvin,' 'Rick' and 'Nancy.'

"And that thing on her forehead is the only thing keeping her from freaking out?" Naminé. asked, "you had to make her forget all about us?"

"It was either that or mess around with an unknown curse," said Malcolm.

"We'll figure out how to fix Kairi after we clean up this mess," said Riku, "just remember your fake names so as not to confuse her."

"We'll remember, Rick," said a mildly giggling Naminé. She then looked at Tess, "Tammy," then at Sora, "Sam," then at Malcolm, "Mitch."

"Whatever, Nancy," said Malcolm.

"So Pretorius was a turncoat," said Tara after hearing the situation from the Bureau agents, "bitch."

"Exactly," said Felicia.

"Oh, before I forget," said Roxas. He and Naminé. then handed the letters to Max and Jill, "your other selves wanted you to have these."

"Our counterparts?" Max asked as he and Jill took the letters.

"Anything from out counterparts?" Steven asked, while Felicia, Julia and Mark looked on with hopeful eyes.

"I think you guys are dead in the other world," said Roxas.

"Oh," said a disappointed Felicia.

"We'll make sure Leon gets his," said Max, "but if I'm right, then it'll be telling him not to get drunk on his birthday."

"He's still doing that?" Katina asked. She then laughed, "I'll never forget the time he got drunk and ran through the Las Vegas strip."

"Nor the time he got drunk and ran naked through Trafalgar Square," said Jill.

"Next he'll be running naked through a cactus patch," said Aaron through a disapproving tone, "that idiot has a drinking problem!"

"Admission is the first step to recovery," said Laura.

"Tell that to Leon," said Jill.

Just then Patricia received another email, "now what?" she asked as she opened the message. Her eyes widened in shock at what she read, "oh my god! Everyone! We've been taken for a ride bigger than we thought!"

... Somewhere dark...

"In you go, freak!" snapped Dalton as he and Orlando threw Frankie into a third energy cage that Darcy summoned. The cage was then levitated up to Clair and Violet.

"This can't be happening!" said a desperate Frankie, "there's has to have been a mistake somewhere," she then looked down at Solaris, "you can't be with these maniacs! You're my godmother!"

"I never actually said I was your godmother," said Solaris in a spiteful tone, "you may have inherited a lot from your parents, Frankie Stein, but you lack the genius of Henry Frankenstein and Septimus Pretorius, genius that I have. I perfected Soma-99 and gave it to Lucas and his cabal!"

"It brought us closer to perfection than ever before!" said Lucas, "and after the ritual, we shall be as gods!"

"Demigods, you mean," said Icy, "my sisters and I, we shall become the real goddesses." She then burped up another fly.

"You'd better believe it," said Darcy, while Stormy nodded in agreement as they both barely contained their giggles.

"And what about you, doc?" Clair asked Solaris, "what are you gonna ask from Yog-Sothoth?"

"That's assuming the creature doesn't kill her first," said Violet.

Solaris visibly flinched at Violet's words, but then she smirked, "not that it makes any difference to you Outer God fodder, but I shall receive the secret of life itself. With that secret, I shall gain the power to raise the dead, and create an empire of occult science!"

"Pathetic," muttered Stormy.

"Hey, you've got your dreams and I've got mine," said Solaris, "now, all we need to do is get The Necronomicon away from Violet."

"You'll have to kill me to get it!" said Violet, "and you can't touch me so long as I have the book!"

"I'm still trying to figure out how to get her to give it up," said Darcy.

"Never mind," said Solaris as she pulled out her phone, "I know who can get her to relinquish the book," she then sent a text out.

"Who could you possibly be in communication with?" Paulette asked.

"The real mastermind of this little operation," said Solaris, "then man whom without which, none of this would have been possible."

"And here I thought you were the brains of the outfit," said Clair, "you're just another stooge."

"You all are stooges!" said Violet.

"And you, Solaris, you're a traitor to the world!" Frankie shouted.

"You betrayed science and humanity!" snapped Violet, "and for what? So you could raise the dead?"

"The only good necromancer is a destroyed necromancer," said Clair, "or one that never takes up the dark arts."

"I already have," said Solaris, "since it was I who crafted the power boosting items worn by The Trix."

"They've been a great help," said Stormy.

"But they still haven't gotten us the book!" said an irate Icy, "and now you're calling in someone whom you claim to be in charge. Well, I'd like to talk to this so called mastermind."

"As would I," said Lucas.

Just then a tall thin man with pale skin and wearing a black and gray pinstripe suit walked in. He had an elongated appearance, very angular, with long fingers, a hawkish nose and a balding head with gray hair and a very bushy unibrow.

"It would seem," said the man in a dramatic tone, "that my arrival was rightly timed."

Clair and Frankie then realized that Violet was looking at the man with a horrified expression, as if the man was the most terrifying thing in existence.

"Ah, everything is in place," said the man as he eyed the groups of villains in turn, first at Lucas and his cabals, "the prejudiced lunatics whom seek to eradicate those they see unfit to live." He then looked at The Trix, "the wickedly beautiful magic users seeking to dominate their home dimension," and then at Solaris, "and the dear mad doctor with dreams of immortality."

"And the fire-happy actor whom planned this mad escapade," said Solaris.

"In the flesh," said the man.

"Just who the hell are you?" Stormy asked.

"Count Olaf," said Violet in a subdued tone.

"That's Olaf!?" exclaimed Clair, "that's the overacting madman who murdered your parents and so many of your legal guardians?"

At that the man, Count Olaf, looked up at Clair, Violet and Frankie, "ah, yes, the three sacrifices. How good to see you in such a secure position. We wouldn't want anything to happen to you before your appointed hour with destiny."

"The only destiny I'm gonna have is getting out of here!" shouted Frankie. She then grabbed the bars of the energy cage and administered a charge of electricity from her neck bolts. But the energy bars absorbed the charge, then sent it right back at Frankie, knocking her down.

"Frankie!" shouted Clair.

"I'm alright," said Frankie in a dazed tone, "I'm more upset than hurt."

"The idea was to keep you from escaping or hurting yourself," said Icy, "wouldn't be fair if Yog-Sothoth was denied his meal."

"Indeed," said Olaf. He then glared at Violet, "oh, how I longed to see you in such a position, dear little orphan Violet. How many times I came close to obtaining your inheritance, only to have it snatched away by you and your meddling siblings. Well, your brother and sister are not here to help you now! You're alone and completely helpless!"

"Bull crap!" snapped Clair, "she's not alone!"

"And she's not helpless!" said Frankie as she stood up, "so long as we're here, so long as Violet has friends, she'll always beat you!"

"Gee, where's a violin player when you need one?" Orlando asked in a mocking tone.

"Let me tell you something, little monster," said Olaf, "friendship and love are for the weak."

At that Violet glared angrily down at Olaf, "you're lying, Olaf! Friendship and love aren't weaknesses! They give the heart strength and courage in times of need."

"Even when you're in a hopeless situation," said Frankie, "when things are so dark you're afraid you'll never find your way back to the light, even if you're separated from those you love, you're never truly alone, so long as you keep the light going in your heart."

At that Olaf clapped mockingly, "bravo, dear little Monster, bravo. I'll be sure to nominate you for the next Tony Awards."

"Where as you couldn't even win an award for bad acting!" snapped Clair, "you're no criminal mastermind, you're just a imposter, a thief, a liar, a murdering arsonist and a really bad actor!"

"You think kidnapping me will get Jill to give up my inheritance to you!?" Violet asked, "you know what she told me when I told her all about the times you fooled Uncle Monty, Aunt Josephine and the others? She said that she could spot a disguised man at thirty paces, her eyes and instincts are that good. And don't think holding me hostage will force her either? She'll find and kill you!"

"By the time any of those pathetic heroes find us, it'll be too late!" said Icy.

"Even if they did," said Olaf, "I am no longer interested in The Baudelaire Fortune."

At that Violet blinked in confusion, "what? No, you've got to be after the fortune. That's what you've always been after! You murdered my parents to get it!"

"If it's not money you want," said Frankie, "Then what is it? Why are you doing this to us?"

"If only you knew," said Olaf as he smiled viciously, "if only you knew. In fact, I believe I'll tell you. This plan was never about money. It was about power. Lucas, Icy and Solaris, they all seek power for their own desires. But I desire something grander. Solaris seeks to raise the dead. Lucas seeks to rid this world of Monsters, while The Trix seek to dominate The Magical Dimension.

"I seek a grander dream, a dream of unlimited power. I seek to become a true god, a supreme overlord of a universe of my own! I spent many a year on the stage, sometimes portraying roles of my own design, while other times I played the part assigned to me by another writer and director. But once I have been blessed by Yog-Sothoth, I shall be the ultimate writer, the ultimate director, the ultimate actor, playing on the ultimate stage! I shall be supreme!"

At that Clair spat down from her cage onto Olaf, the wad of saliva landing right on his hawkish nose.

"You're crazy!" shouted Clair, "you're all crazy! Opening the door for Yog-Sothoth is gonna get us killed and endanger the whole world! You're all insane!"

"Insane am I?" Olaf asked, "no, I am not lunatic. Lunatics lose. I've won."

"You mean 'we've' won," said Icy. She then burped up another fly.

"We're in this together, remember?" Lucas asked.

"Oh, yes, how could I forget?" Olaf asked, "we are in this together. Yes, we shall soon have all we desire," he then glared up at Violet, "just as soon as the dear little orphan surrenders the book!"

"Never!" Violet shouted as she clutched The Necronomicon, "I couldn't stop you from harming those you've already harmed, Olaf, but I won't let you endanger the whole world!"

At that Olaf laughed viciously at Violet, "defiant as always. I'll miss that quality about you, Violet, that and other... interesting qualities. A shame, you've become such a lovely young woman. I do regret that our marriage ended before it ever began."

Overcome by hate and rage, Violet was once again tempted to open The Necronomicon and use it. She looked down at the book. It was almost as if it was speaking to her, telling her that it had the power to destroy this horrible man whom had inflicted so much pain and misery on her. All Violet had to do was open the book and the power would be hers.

Violet nearly opened the book, but then she snapped back to reality and saw Clair and Frankie. She saw the looks of reassurance and hope on their faces, the looks of compassion and friendship, promising her that everything would somehow be alright.

"You can have the book, Olaf, when I'm dead and buried," said Violet.

"You can't sacrifice us without it," said Clair.

"And even if you threaten to torture us," said Frankie, "I doubt Violet will give up the book."

"Care to back that up?" Paulette asked as she pulled out a knife, while Orlando played with his lighter.

"Oh, let me torture them," said Eliza, "I've got so many toys to play with, I'd love to share them."

"Can she do it?" Icy asked Lucas, "can she torture the other two into making Violet give us the book?"

"It's a distinct possibility," said Lucas, "but then, Eliza's toys are notorious for leaving her 'playmates' excessively damaged."

"Too damaged to be of any use to us?" Solaris asked, "if so, then forget it! We need the sacrifices intact."

"Oh, please!" said Eliza, "let me play with them! I'll be ever so careful, just a few broken bones, a pint or two of lost blood and some shredded skin, that's all."

"I have a different method," said Olaf, "one just as emotionally damaging and will leave barely a mess."

"Tell us this method," said Lucas.

"I could," said Olaf as he smiled wickedly, "or, I could show you all. Follow me and you shall see."

"I'd like to see it," said Stormy.

"As would I," said Paulette.

"We all would," said Icy.

"Not me," said Eliza stubbornly, "I want to play with Clair and the freak."

"You'll see this alternate method and like it!" snapped Lucas, "or I'll snap your neck!"

At that Eliza stubbornly crossed her arms, "oh, you're no fun anymore, Lucas!" she pouted.

"Too bad, you're coming," said Lucas.

"I'll stay and keep watch on the sacrifices," said Solaris, "I want to taunt Frankie some more."

"Birthday suit yourself," said Dalton.

"We shall return before the appointed hour," said Olaf, "upon which Violet will relinquish The Necronomicon."

"You've got nothing that'll make that happen!" shouted Violet.

"We shall see," said Olaf. With that he, The Trix and the Monster Haters exited the chamber, leaving Violet, Clair and Frankie alone with Solaris.

"Okay, you've got my attention," said an irate Frankie, "so make your taunting count, Solaris, 'cause if I ever get the chance, I'll break you! Hey, are you listening to me?"

Solaris' attention was elsewhere as she darted to the chamber entrance and placed a small device with a flashing green light onto the wall, then did the same with three more devices along the chamber wall.

"There," she said once the devices were all placed, "now we can talk freely."

"All so you can insult Frankie more?" Clair asked, "screw you!"

"I was an idiot for trusting you," said Frankie, "I should have known you were a villain!"

"I'm no villain!" snapped Solaris, "I'm trying to help you, Clair and Violet."

"Say what now?" Clair asked.

"But you just told us that you were gonna kill us so you could become a necromancer," said Violet.

"I was lying in order to gain the trust of those maniacs!" said Solaris, "I'm trying to bring Lucas, The Trix and Olaf down for good!"

"You've got to be kidding me," said Clair, "you really think we're that stupid?"

"Like we'd fall for such a lie," said Violet, "you actually think we'll believe that you're really our friend and that you're planning to double cross Olaf and the others."

At that Solaris looked up at Violet, her eyes burning with righteous fury, "I hate Olaf more than you can possibly imagine. The Trix, Lucas and his group are all pawns in Olaf's game, just as he thinks I'm another pawn, another actor he can direct. Well, I'm the real director here. Olaf, Icy, Lucas and the others, they're all following my script without even knowing it."

"Okay, now I'm confused," said Frankie, "just who are you?"

"I am indeed Solaris Pretorius," she said, "and I was telling the truth that I helped you into existence, Frankie Stein. I'm so sorry that I had to drag you into this, but it was necessary in order for Olaf and the others to trust me," she then looked at Clair, "I'm also sorry you were dragged into this. I had hope that Lucas's old desire for Lilith would make her his choice for a sacrifice. She would have understood why. Again, I'm sorry."

"Not as sorry as you'll be if you don't make sense," said an irate Clair.

"I'm getting to it," said Solaris. She then ate more of her wasabi covered fruit and vegetables.

"Why do you eat so much wasabi?" Frankie asked.

"I'll get to that too," said Solaris after swallowing, "but I owe one more round of apologies," she then looked at Violet, "if I had known that The Trix were going to take you at the museum, I would never have allowed this plan to go forward."

"You sure have a funny way of showing your compassion," said Violet.

"You must believe me, I would never wish you any harm, Violet," said Solaris in a pleading tone, her eyes watering with tears, "never, for you are truly one of the great treasures of humanity."

At that Violet blinked in confusion. She had been called that, 'one of the great treasures of humanity,' but she couldn't remember from when.

"Have we met before?" Violet asked cautiously.

"We have," said Solaris, "I knew your mother and father, Bertrand and Beatrice Baudelaire. They helped me when I was truly in need, both as friends and financial supporters. But I'm getting ahead of myself, so I'll start at the beginning.

"I was always fascinated by the supernatural. As soon as I could read, I delved into stories about mortals with extraordinary abilities, paranormal activities and especially Monsters. I believed that Monsters were no less people than ordinary humans, and I thought that anyone who thought otherwise was a fool.

"As I grew up, I dedicated myself to the study of metaphysics and parapsychology, with biochemistry as my major when I went to college. Yet at the core of my studies was the work of Drs. Henry Frankenstein and Septimus Pretorius, my ancestor. They were truly the first mortal scientists to push the boundaries of science into the realms of life and death, and succeeded, the end result being the mother and father of young Frankie here.

"I knew that Henry was obsessed with creating new life, almost to the point of madness, while Septimus was indeed insane. But I didn't care, for I believed in their work, that we can be masters of life and death. I knew that it was possible to create new life out of the dead, but I also knew that it was possible to create new life out of completely original organic material, no more grave robbing. I just needed to prove it.

"The one thing I lacked was funding, and I knew that no respectable benefactor would want anything to do with the work of Henry Frankenstein. There are still many whom remember the ruckus Frankie's father caused in his first days of life."

"My father was scared and confused in those days," said Frankie, "That girl he accidentally drowned, he didn't know what he was doing, he just thought it was all a game. And all those people he hurt, he was just defending himself. He had every right to do so, they wanted to tear him apart."

"And the fact that he was scared of fire didn't help," said Clair.

"Yeah, well, he got over it after he met mom," said Frankie, "and she was scared and confused when she first met him too. Could you blame her? She had just woken up, with no idea of who she was, where she was or who those strange people were or what they wanted with her. And seeing my dad for the first time kinda freaked her out, but they eventually found love and went into hiding together, letting the world think they were destroyed."

"Your mother and father eventually became great scientists," said Solaris, "they used fake names and backgrounds so they could work alongside humans without attracting attention, while also teaching at Monster High. They were happy in their work and with each other, but they were the only ones of their kind and were lonely. I helped ease their loneliness, but I'll get to that in a minute.

"I used my doctorates in metaphysics and parapsychology to gain a position in The Bureau. It wasn't the best paying job, but at least I was getting front line experience. I learned more about Monsters, Meta Humans, magic, demons and other dark forces in a few short years than I had before, while also taking up a few hobbies, the latest being mycology. I got very good at identifying poisonous and non-poisonous mushrooms, and know over 300 mushroom recipes.

"Aside from my work with The Bureau, I did consultant work for various biochemistry firms and laboratories, earning what I could to fund my true research. But it wasn't enough, not nearly enough, what with bills to pay, food to eat, clothes to wear and to keep a roof over my head.

"But then came my big break. I was invited to a benefit dinner in Washington, where I met Bertrand and Beatrice Baudelaire. As fate would have it, I wound up at the same table as Bertrand and Beatrice and we talked about Henry Frankenstein. The two of them were intrigued by my theories and asked me to come to their house for lunch."

Solaris then looked at Violet, "that's when I met you. You were only seven at the time and already a great inventor, though at the time you were in the middle of a creative block. I told you to stay true to your dreams and beliefs, to never stop asking questions, to always seek the truth, for you where, are and always will be, one of humanity's great treasures."

At that, Violet's eyes widened in shock, "I remember you now! You gave me the confidence to keep inventing."

"And it's a good thing you did," said Solaris, "Olaf would have destroyed you if you hadn't stayed true to yourself. The same thing applies to your brother and sister."

"But what happened to you, Solaris?" Frankie asked, "why are you working with The Monster Haters, The Trix and Olaf?"

"A cruel twist of fate," said Solaris, "but I've still more to tell first. Anyway, Bertrand and Beatrice believed that my research and theories would bear fruit, so they loaned me enough money to truly begin my work. For seven years I labored, balancing my research with my obligations to The Bureau, all the while staying in touch with my friends, Bertrand and Beatrice. Slowly but surely, all the pieces to the puzzle were finally fitting together. I was getting closer and closer to unlocking the secrets of life and death."

At that Solaris frowned with sadness, "and just when I had a major breakthrough and was going to present my findings to my colleagues in The Bureau, my world fell apart. Bertrand and Beatrice had been murdered, while Violet, Klaus and Sunny had been taken away, placed into the custody of that despicable Olaf!

"Violet, believe me when I say that I tried to help you and your siblings. Yet I was blocked in every turn. I wasn't a blood relative, nor was I a close friend, not in the eyes of that idiot Mr. Poe. I tried to convince him that I would be the perfect guardian, that I would provide a warm, loving, safe home for you, Klaus and Sunny. Every time I heard that you were being moved to another location, every time I heard that Olaf had ruined another life in his insane quest to gain your inheritance, every time I begged Mr. Poe to take you in. And every time he refused. And the experience nearly drove me mad.

"I was at my lowest then. I abandoned my responsibilities at The Bureau and ignored my research. I fell into drink and excessive eating. I would have most likely killed myself one way or another, when I remembered something remarkable. I kept every letter that Bertrand and Beatrice wrote to me, including the envelopes. It

seemed like a miracle but there they were, viable DNA samples of the two of them, taken from dried salvia on the envelopes."

At that the gears in Violet's mind went into overdrive and in the blink of an eye, she realized what Solaris was getting at. "My God! You... you were going to clone my parents?"

"It was both insane and brilliant," said Solaris, "as genius and madness so often go together. Yes, I was going to clone your mother and father. With them alive again, there would be no more need of Mr. Poe. No longer would you, Klaus and Sunny be placed in the care of irresponsible guardians. No longer would you be exposed to the vile machinations of Olaf."

"And you'd get more money from Violet's parents," said Clair in a disapproving tone.

"Screw the money!" snapped Solaris, "I wanted my friends back! I wanted Violet, Klaus and Sunny to have their parents again. I wanted the children safe, I wanted them happy and loved. And I would do whatever it took to see it happen. I was infected with the same madness that drove Henry Frankenstein and Septimus Pretorius, and I reveled in it.

"But in order to bring my friends back to life, I needed to prove that I could do it. I had to test my theories out. You all should know that The Bureau is very cautious when it comes to cloning and stem cells. I knew that if I went to them for help, they would delay me with excessive tests and bureaucratic red tape. There was also the possibility that the main scientists at The Bureau would take away the DNA samples and prevent me from doing further work.

"I couldn't risk it, not after coming so far. So I sought out the only ones who could help me, the two people in all of the world who were closest to Henry Frankenstein and Septimus Pretorius; Frank N. Stein and his Bride.

"By then they were desperate for a child, but they knew if they went to another scientist for help, they'd be turned down. Despite Frank N. Stein's work to benefit the world, the haunted memory of Frankenstein was still alive in the scientific community. No one wanted another fiasco like what happened before.

"So, when I went to Frank N. Stein and his Bride and explained everything, they were more than willing to work with me. They wanted a child, I wanted to prove my theories."

At that, Frankie was both outraged and heartbroken, "was that all I was to you? To my mom and dad? Just a means to an end? All so you could prove your work and bring back your friends?"

"Now I know you're mad!" said an outraged Clair, "I just had to be sure!"

"If my parents knew that you'd use Frankie just to see if you could bring them back to life," said Violet, "they'd want to stay dead!"

"You misunderstand completely," said Solaris, "I've tried to explain, but you're not listening. I'll try again. I have the utmost respect for Frankie's parents. We're more than scientific colleges. They were brought to life by my ancestor and Henry Frankenstein, the two people who influenced every moment of my existence.

"When I met Frankie's parents, I felt an instant connection with them, and they felt connected with me too. I felt in my heart their loneliness, their desire for a child. The fact that we could help each other realize our dreams only made our connection that much deeper, our friendship that much closer.

"With my research, I was able to help Frank N. Stein and his Bride create a new life. They supplied the majority of the parts that made Frankie, while I used my cloning technique to grow a brand new heart and brain. Yes, Frankie, your brain and heart didn't come from dead girls, they're all your own, well, almost all your own."

"What do you mean?" Frankie as one hand went to her heart while the other touched her head, "wait, you said you cloned a brain and a heart, so who did you clone them from?"

"I had a source at hand," said Solaris, "Frankie, your brain was cloned from Bertrand's DNA sample, while your heart came from Beatrice's DNA. And it worked. You live."

"My brain and heart," said Frankie, "they came from Violet's parents."

"I... I don't know what to say," said a dumbfounded Violet.

"Say that you're pissed!" snapped Clair, "tell this crazy bitch that she had no right to use your parents in that way. She should have left them rest in peace instead of using them like a mad science fair experiment!"

"If I hadn't, then Frankie may not be alive," said Solaris.

"She has a point, I guess," said Frankie. "But I still don't understand. I've got the brain and heart of Violet's mom and dad, but, I don't remember anything about them."

"That's because your brain was grown without any experiences in it," said Solaris, "the same thing goes for your heart. I knew that bringing Bertrand and Beatrice back from the dead would seem like a paper mâché volcano, compared to reviving their memories. I still had far to go, but I was flushed with success. I took off as soon as I was sure that Frankie would be alright.

"Once again, money was an issue. The world was still recovering from the recession, so it was difficult to find funding. But I didn't care where I got the money, I was on the right track in my work. So when a rich eccentric with a passion for rare and exotic mushrooms approached me to find a specific species, I grabbed the chance without truly thinking about it.

"We searched for and found the rare and extremely toxic *Medusoid Mycelia*, a fungi capable of retracting itself underground and sprouting a few feet away. It's spores are more lethal than snake and puffer fish venom, capable of killing a man inside an hour after exposure, making it a species more hated than weeds. *Medusoid Mycelia* had been all but eradicated from the face of the Earth, with only one isolated location where it survived.

"We found it in the remote Gorgonian Grotto. At first glance, it seemed like an ordinary mushroom, but then I saw the cap retract underground, only to reappear a few yards away. There were dozens of them within first sight, while hundreds more were peppered throughout the cave. My employer and I wore special gas masks to protect us from the deadly spores and we proceeded to study the mushrooms.

"Up close, they were as fascinating as I had hoped they would be. I knew that if I could analyze it, *Medusoid Mycelia* would greatly benefit pharmaceutical research, despite the risks of the spores.

"I had just secured a sample in an airtight container, when I felt the straps on my gasmask break. I was then pushed from behind and fell face first into a large patch of the mushrooms. In my dazed state, I inhaled a massive amount of the spores."

"Good grief!" exclaimed Violet.

"I know," said Solaris. "I knew I was pretty much dead, when I heard my benefactor laughing. He then identified himself as Count Olaf."

"Son of a bitch," said Clair irately.

"I know," said Solaris, "we got out of the grotto and he told me that he set me up because he needed my assistance in one of his plans. I told him he could go to hell and that I ought to try and send him there, express delivery. He laughed it off and said that I would regret harming him. I told him I had nothing to lose, since I would be dead in less than an hour, so why not kill him while I still had time?"

"He told me that if he died, then his followers, his acting trop, had orders to kill Violet, Klaus and Sunny. He then showed me proof that his people were watching the children, that he could have them killed any time he wanted. I was willing to call his bluff, because I knew that if all three Baudelaire children died at once, there would be an intense investigation and the Baudelaire estate, Violet's inheritance, would be placed in trust of the federal government. I should know, I read up on Bertrand and Beatrice's will.

"I told Olaf that he would lose his chance at the fortune if anything happened to the children. He said he was after a bigger prize than Violet's inheritance. He told me that the spores could be countered with horseradish, a special enzyme in the vegetable neutralizes the poison."

"That explains your obsession with wasabi," said Frankie.

"Not entirely," said Solaris. She then paused to eat more wasabi-coated dried fruit and vegetables. "Moving on, because I had inhaled such a massive amount of the spores, they've infected my lungs and blood with the poison. So long as I keep eating horseradish, the poison is kept at bay and I still live. But even if I eat nothing but horseradish and horseradish-based meals, the poison is still active. I have maybe a few months at the outside before my circulatory and respiratory systems fail and I die."

"That still doesn't explain why you're working with Olaf," said Violet, "I... I understand what you went through, but I still don't know why?"

"If you've got nothing to lose," said Frankie, "if you're going to die anyway, why work with that creepazoid?"

"Because he took the DNA samples of Bertrand and Beatrice," said Solaris. "I kept them with me at all times after I initially found them, but I left them at my hotel when I went into the grotto. Olaf had the samples taken, while also burning my other letters and envelopes from Bertrand and Beatrice. He said that if I didn't do as he said, he'd

burn the samples and I'd lose my chance to bring my friends back, forever."

"Couldn't you use my brain and heart?" Frankie asked.

"It wouldn't work," said Solaris, "your brain and heart are your own, just as the rest of your body is. All your parts mutated slightly when you were first brought to life, making your DNA as unique as the DNA of every single life form in existence. If I were to take a sample from your brain and heart, I'd only end up cloning you.

"I had no choice but to submit to Olaf. He never told me where he got his resources, but he gave me the means to perfect Soma-99 and craft the power-enhancing items for The Trix. He also told me to get the security specifics for the gala and to grab a Monster for the sacrifice to Yog-Sothoth. The Trix and Lucas would provide the other two sacrifices. Once he had everything in place, he'd give back the DNA samples and I'd be free to go."

"He'll never give back the samples!" Violet shouted, "he's probably destroyed them out of spite."

At that Solaris glared up at Violet with eyes as hard and cold as steel, "I know he has. He destroyed them the moment I agreed to his demands and my back was turned. Bertrand and Beatrice are gone for good."

"Then why work with him?" Clair asked.

"For revenge!" exclaimed Solaris, "I'll be dead in a few months, so I might as well take the son of a bitch with me, as well as The Trix and The Monster Haters. They don't know that their fates are sealed. I crafted the power-enhancing items to fail when the witches channel enough magic through them. At the rate they've been going, one more good battle and the items will shatter, leaving them as weak as kittens, if not dead from the explosion and magical backlash.

"I also added a flaw to Soma-99. Lucas and his gang of degenerates are slowly poisoning themselves. Every time they come down from their latest high, they feel more and more weakened and are in more and more pain. Soon they'll be so addicted to Soma-99, they'll need it all the time just to be out of pain and in no condition to hurt anyone.

"As for Olaf, I've got the perfect revenge in mind. But I've held it back. I'm waiting for the right moment to strike, just when he thinks he's won. I never had any intention of allowing the sacrifice go through. Believe me, girls, Yog-Sothoth will never set foot in this world, not tonight that is."

"That thing won't even get the chance," said Clair, "Violet still has The Necronomicon."

"It's been protecting me," said Violet, "call me crazy, but I think the book is alive."

At that Solaris frowned with confused concern, "that doesn't make any sense. It's just a book. It isn't alive."

"But I've felt it," said Violet, "ever since I grabbed it in the museum, I've felt... something, from the book. As time went on, I realized that it was protecting me from the Icy, Lucas and the others. It didn't want to be used by them so it protected the both of us."

"That's never happened before," said Solaris, "I should know, I know pretty much everything about The Necronomicon. In all its long history, in every instance it was used, no matter what translation involved, it has never projected a protective field around its holder."

"But it's been tempting Violet to use it all night," said Clair.

"You haven't used it, right?" Frankie asked.

"We'd probably be in even worse trouble if she had," said Solaris, "no, the book isn't tempting you, Violet, it doesn't have that power. True, the dark magic contained in the book has a way of luring people

into reading it, but it's like being tempted with junk food or a cigarette. If you say no, that's that, it won't bother you anymore," she then paused for a second in thought, "unless... unless you're being pressured by your peers. Violet, when the book is tempting you, is it like a voice in your mind?"

"Yeah," said a visibly unnerved Violet, "I could almost hear a voice the last time it wanted me to use it."

"I think there's things going on that not even Olaf took into account," said Solaris in a serious tone, "Violet, no matter what, don't listen too the voice! The next time you're being tempted, shut the voice out! Focus on the faces of those you love; your parents, your brother and sister."

"Think about Jill!" said Frankie, "she's crazy about you."

"Oh, Jill Sparrow," said Solaris in a subdued tone, "I should have sent her an apology."

"What are you talking about?" Clair asked.

"I sent Deputy Director Walker a time-delayed email explaining everything," said Solaris. She then checked her watch, then ate more wasabi, "she should have gotten it a few minutes ago. Assuming Patricia and the others believe it, they'll tear the city apart to find us."

"Couldn't you tell them where we are?" Violet asked.

"Even I don't know where we are," said Solaris, "the device I used to teleport us in came from an outside source, preprogrammed for a single use. The internal circuitry self destructed after I got here with Frankie, so I'm afraid our friends in The Bureau, the Monsters and the Keyblade Wielders are on their own."

"Then we're doomed," said Clair, "they'll never find us."

"No, they'll find us," said Frankie in a determined tone, "if Clawdeen, Clawd and Howleen don't sniff us out first, then Katina or Laura would, or maybe Shawn."

"Who's Shawn?" Violet asked.

"A really cute psychic," said Frankie, "he's really good at tracking people and things. I think you'll like him. That reminds me, when we get out of this, I've got to try and hook Lilith and Chad up."

"Lilith and Chad?!" a surprised Clair asked.

"He's had a crush on her for a while," said Frankie, "and she'd like him if she'd give him a chance."

"They'll be time enough for love later," said Solaris. She then looked behind at the chamber entrance, "they're coming back." She then looked up at Frankie, Violet and Clair, "I'll do everything I can to delay the ritual until the cavalry shows up. Until then, you hate my guts, remember?"

"Got it," said Clair as she gave Solaris the thumbs up, while Frankie and Violet winked.

Just as they all heard The Trix, The Monster Haters and Olaf returning to the chamber, Clair shouted at Solaris, her face twisted with rage, "you crazy bitch! You goat-sucking psychopathic whore! You'll never get away with this!"

"Jill and the others will find us!" shouted Violet.

"And they'll rip your head off!" shouted Frankie, "assuming Cleo doesn't curse you first!"

"Like she cursed Icy?" Darcy asked as she and Stormy giggled.

"I'll turn that miserable mummy princess into a meat popsicle!" snapped Icy. She then burped up another fly.

"Enjoyed your taunting, Dr. Pretorius?" Olaf asked.

"Not as much as I wanted to, my dear Count Olaf," said Solaris, "but I managed to get a lot of water under the bridge." She then glanced up at Violet, Clair and Frankie, silently telling them with her eyes that she is still with them.

"You can say whatever you want, *doctor*," said Violet in a contemptuous tone, "you'll never make me give up The Necronomicon! Go ahead and torture Frankie and Clair! They'll endure whatever you throw at them!"

"Violet would do the same for us!" said Clair, while Frankie nodded in agreement.

"How touching," said Paulette, "three newly best friends vowing to stick together through thick and thin." she then injected more Soma-99 into her system, "if I had anything in my stomach, I'd throw up."

"When was the last time you guys ate?" Darcy asked.

"I can't remember," said Dalton, while Orlando, Lucas and the other Monster Haters shook their heads, "we've been running on Soma-99 for so long, it gives us all the nutrients and stimulants we need."

"And I haven't slept in days!" said Eliza, "And yet I'm still beautiful, aren't I?"

"Like a pile of dragon dung," said Frankie.

At that Eliza pulled out a knife, "you just wait until the sacrifice! I couldn't cut Lilith's heart out, but I'll get to do yours!"

"You didn't kill Lilith!" shouted Frankie, "she's alive and better than before!"

"What are you talking about?!" Lucas asked, "Lilith von Hellscream is dead!"

"We saw her die!" shouted Dalton, while Paulette and Orlando nodded in agreement.

"She got better," said Frankie, "just wait until she and the others show up, you'll understand then."

"So, you've got a secret, huh?" Eliza asked. She then grinned almost as wide as the Cheshire Cat, as if she had a massive bombshell she was itching to drop, "well, so do I."

"We all have a secret for you," said Icy. She then burped up another fly, "Damn it! When is this stupid curse gonna end!?"

"You can ask Yog-Sothoth to end it when he comes," said Darcy.

"Good idea," said Icy. She then glared up at Violet, "and he will come, once you give us the book."

"And you will, Violet," said Olaf as he smiled wickedly, a smile that sent shivers up Violet's spine, "after you see what I have." He then looked back at the entrance of the chamber, "bring it in!" he shouted.

In walked Olaf's theater troupe. There was the Hook-Handed Man, the Two White-Faced Women, The Pimpled Man, The Bald Man With The Long Nose and The Person of Indeterminate Gender.

The Bald Man and The Pimpled Man were wheeling in a large box-like object covered by a white cloth. Violet, Frankie and Clair looked at the covered box and none of them wanted to know what was in it. Yet, curious, they looked at Solaris, whom sent them a look that confessed her ignorance of the contents of the box.

"I'll give you once more chance, Violet," said Olaf, "surrender The Necronomicon and spare yourself a horrific shock that will make your last moments in life so much more painful."

"Go to hell!" snapped Violet.

"So be it!" said Olaf in a dramatic manner. He then walked to the box and grabbed one edge of the cloth, "let's see you be defiant after this!" he then whipped the cloth off of the box, revealing it to be a steel cage, and what was in the cage sent an emotional spike deep into Violet's heart.

... Outside St. Vincent's Hospital...

"Let me get this straight," said Sora, "Solaris is one of the good guys?"

"Apparently, yes," said Patricia. She had just finished reading the email Solaris sent her, "she's been working to bring The Trix and the Monster Haters down all this time."

"And that sick bastard Olaf is at the core of it," said Jill irately. "I should have tried to find and kill him before!"

"There's nothing you could have done to prevent this," Katina said in a reassuring manner, "Olaf is the kind of person whom cannot be found if he doesn't want to be."

"He's one of us, isn't he," said Julia irately, "a Meta Human."

"It's a distinct possibility," said Aaron, "the man has absolutely no talent as an actor. He thinks himself a master of disguise but any one with half a brain could identify him, no matter what getup he's wearing."

"He must have an ability to fool the unwary mind," said Laura, "that's how he's been able to convince so many people that his disguises were genuine."

"We can analyze his DNA after we kill the bastard," said Mark.

"We've got to find him, the girls and the book first," said Shawn. "I'm sorry, Patricia, but I've been trying to locate Violet, Clair and Frankie,

but no dice."

"Keep trying, Shawn," said Patricia, "Solaris' email said that the ritual to summon Yog-Sothoth will take place between midnight and dawn, before the Winter Solstice officially ends."

"They're waiting for the stars to be right," said Katina as she looked up, "for the right celestial alignment, when the veil between our world and the other is at its thinnest."

"You'd think they would have done it this morning when the Solstice began," said Cleo.

Ghoulia moaned something.

"That's right, it was overcast this morning," said Clawd.

"Well, I can see plenty of stars now," said Deuce.

"And it's almost midnight," said Draculaura, "they could start any time now," she then began bawling, "Clair, Frankie and Violet are going to die!" She then buried her head in Clawd's chest and began sobbing, with him putting his hands around her in a comforting manner.

"Over my dead body!" snapped Lagoona as she, Operetta and Riku got back up.

"You should be resting!" exclaimed Aaron, "it's bad that so many of us died tonight and many more are wounded. You were lucky to have just been poisoned, but you're in no condition to fight."

"I'll be the judge of that," said Kairi, "Dr. Spartan, you're a great physician, but this requires a magic touch." She then walked up to Jill and healed her wounded hand.

"Good lord!" exclaimed Jill, "you're a miracle worker!"

"No, just a Princess of Heart with a lot of gifts," said Kairi.

"Speaking of gifts," said Aiden. He then took out a small package and handed it to Malcolm, "compliments of Professor Slughorn."

Malcolm opened the package and saw several vials, "my potion, he... he finished it?"

"And it works," said Aiden, "one swig will replenish your strength and keep you going for hours, if not days. One dose allowed me to transmute over six hundred machine parts for the portal projector without a break."

"Then let's see what this... Giga Potion does," said Malcolm. He then handed a vial to Riku, Operetta, Lagoona and Clawdeen. They all drank the potion and within seconds, were fully restored.

"I feel like I could swim all the way to Australia and back three times over!" said Lagoona as she happily hugged Gill.

"I could rip apart a thousand demons!" said Clawdeen. She then let out a joyful howl.

"I'm just glad to have my voice back," said Operetta.

"I'm just glad, period," said Riku.

"Okay, we're all in fighting form again," said Jill as she flexed her healed hand, "except for Leon. Any chance we can get him back?"

"He's halfway back to Washington by now," said Aaron, "they stabilized him further at the hotel and he's been airlifted to Water Reed down in D.C."

"Okay, we'll go without him," said Jill.

"But where are we going to go?" Felicia asked.

"Katina," said Max, "she'll know where to go."

"What? Me?" Katina asked, "no, Max, I... I can't. My powers have really been wonky tonight."

"You've just been out of practice," said Max, "yes, you made a few mistakes, but now you're ready to get serious."

"I... I just don't know," said Katina.

"Well, I do," said Max.

"Are you sure about that?" Steven asked.

"You really want to trust the fate of the world to Katina?" Julia asked.

"I'll eat a bucket of scorpions if she's wrong," said Max, "and you can take that to the bank and cash it!"

"Wow, you're serious," said Patricia, "you haven't made an oath like that in a long time."

"And I mean it," said Max. He then looked at Katina, "please, try. I believe in you." He then took her hands in his, "I've always believed in you."

At that Katina blushed and smiled, "alright, I'll try one more time." She then sat down and closed her eyes in concentration.

"Are we really going to trust her?" Steven asked Patricia, "boss, Katina nearly got us killed twice tonight."

"What if she's wrong again?" Julia asked, "we might end up chasing our tails," she then looked at Toralei, "no offense."

"None taken," said Toralei as she sharpened her claws with a nail file.

"But what if Katina ends up getting more of us killed?" Felicia asked, "what if she..."

"I can hear you, you know!" said an annoyed Katina as she kept her eyes closed, "would you mind keeping it down when you're talking behind my back? I'm trying to concentrate!"

"Alright, this ends now," said Jill. She then drew a line in the ground with her saber, "I won't stand for anyone else insulting my friend." She then glared at Steven, Julia, Mark and Felicia, "if you've got any more negative things to say about Katina, cross this line now!"

None of them wanted to cross the line, not if it meant having to fight Jill, so Steven, Mark, Felicia and Julia remained where they were.

"I didn't think so," said Jill as she sheathed her saber.

Just then Katina gasped and fell on her back.

"Katina!" shouted Max as he hurried over to her, while Aaron opened his medical bag again.

"No, I'm alright!" said Katina as she sat up on her own, a bright smile on her face, "I know where Clair, Violet and Frankie are! Central Park!"

"Central Park!?" exclaimed Tess, "we were there yesterday!"

"We fell into the world in Central Park," said Riku.

"And we were right across from it tonight," said Patricia, "at the museum. Katina, where in Central Park?"

"In an underground chamber beneath The Great Lawn," said Katina, "there's a small network of tunnels beneath the park, running between 79th and 85th Street. The entrance is right next to Belvedere Castle."

"We can be there in fourteen minutes if we take 6th Avenue and Central Park West," said Felicia after getting directions on her phone.

"There's more," said Katina, "I saw that Olaf had brought in his theater troupe."

"More cannon fodder for us to destroy," said Steven.

"It's worse," said Katina, "I sensed something more. Two of us aren't who they say they are. Yes, there is a pair of impostors among us, and I know who they are!"

She then pointed an accusing finger at Klaus and Sunny, "they're not human! They're biots!"

"Biots!?" exclaimed Sora, Riku, Kairi, Aiden, Tess, Roxas and Naminé.

"What are biots?" Malcolm asked.

"And why on Earth would you say that, Katina!?" exclaimed Jill.

"Because that's what they are," said Katina as she glared at Klaus and Sunny, whom were looking like they had been wrongfully accused of something horrible.

"Steven and the others are right," said Klaus, "you are nuts!"

Sunny then burbled something along the line of 'you should be locked up!'

"I'm not insane," said Katina, "nor am I wrong."

"There's got to be a way to be sure if they're human or not," said Laura, "I can't sense anything wrong about them, but that doesn't really prove anything. Aaron, check their blood, see if they're indeed human."

"Biots can fake human blood," said Katina.

"How do you know this?" Gill asked.

"I just know," said Katina.

"They smell like Normies," said Howleen.

"They're not!" exclaimed Rebecca, "they're artificial. Trust me, from one construct to another, I can recognize an artificial life form when I see one!"

"And their heart beats are all out of rhythm," said Operetta.

"And their eyes," said Rochelle, "there's no real life in them."

At that Ghoulia moaned something as she typed into her laptop

"She said she knows how to find out the truth," said Clawdeen.

"How?" Jill demanded.

Instead of moaning, Ghoulia showed everyone her computer screen, which was displaying a rapidly color-changing display that was so fast, so bright, so wild and chaotic that it could induce seizures.

And that's what it did to Klaus and Sunny. The two of them began convulsing violently and within seconds, they both exploded. What was left of them oozed a blue viscous fluid.

"Oh my Ra!" exclaimed a horrified Cleo, while everyone else looked on in stunned silence.

Jill finally broke the silence, "how, how did this happen?"

"I'll explain on the way to Central Park," said Katina, "but needless to say, Olaf has all three Baudelaire children at his mercy, and we all know how little of that he has."

The end of chapter 8.

Next chapter finds our heroes racing against time to stop the sacrificial ritual, while Violet is forced to make a decision that could

tear heart apart. And then, just when you think you know who the real enemy, another twist appears. Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie. See you then!

The Temptation of Violet

Last time found our heroes and allies struggling with the fact that Solaris Pretorius betrayed them. But things turned out to be more than they seemed in more ways than one. Count Olaf revealed himself to be the mastermind behind the whole mess, while Solaris revealed to Frankie, Violet and Clair that she had been working to bring Olaf, The Trix and The Monster Haters down once and for all. But then Olaf played his most diabolical plot yet.

Back with the rescuers, Katina finally located Clair, Violet and Frankie in an underground chamber in Central Park, while also revealing that Klaus and Sunny were imposters. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 9: The Temptation of Violet

"I'll give you once more chance, Violet," said Olaf, "surrender The Necronomicon and spare yourself a horrific shock that will make your last moments in life so much more painful."

"Go to hell!" snapped Violet.

"So be it!" said Olaf in a dramatic manner. He then walked to the box and grabbed one edge of the cloth, "let's see you be defiant after this!" he then whipped the cloth off of the box, revealing it to be a steel cage, and what was in the cage sent an emotional spike deep into Violet's heart.

Inside the cage, bound and gagged, were Klaus and Sunny.

"What the hell is this!?" exclaimed Clair.

"It can't be!" said Frankie, "I saw Klaus and Sunny with the others. They were safe," she glared at Olaf, "just what are you trying to prove here!?"

"That I know Violet's weakness," said Olaf, "I know the one thing that will make her give up The Necronomicon."

Both Clair and Frankie wanted to shout to Solaris, demanding if she knew anything about this, but they remembered that Solaris was still a villain in the eyes of Olaf, The Trix and the Monster Haters. Even so, one look in Solaris' eyes told them that she was just as shocked by this as they were.

"Classic villainy," said Darcy, "grab your enemy's loved ones and threaten to kill them."

"If this doesn't break the brat," said Stormy, "nothing will."

"Can I play with them?" Eliza asked as she walked up to the cage, where Klaus and Sunny watched with terrified eyes as Eliza pulled out a knife and banged it against the iron bars, "Lucas, darling? Can I have just a *little* bit of fun with these little ankle biters? Please? Pretty please with sugar lumps on top?"

"Oh, act your age already!" snapped Paulette.

"Leave them be for now, Eliza," said Lucas, "they're our keys to The Necronomicon."

"Assuming Violet is willing to cooperate," said Olaf, "otherwise, dear Eliza, they're all yours."

"Oh, now I'm all confused," said Eliza, "on one hand, I want The Necronomicon. But on the other hand, I want to play with my new friends. Decisions, decisions."

At that Klaus tried to say something urgent but the gag prevented him from being understood.

"Be at ease, Klaus," said Olaf, "your sister won't allow you and Sunny to come to harm," he looked up at Violet, "isn't that right?"

"How?" Violet finally asked, "how did you get them?"

"I'm wondering that myself," said Icy.

"It was quite simple actually," said Olaf, "my beloved fellow thespians," he indicated his acting troupe, "they had infiltrated the catering staff of the gala. Dear Violet, you and your freakish friends had no idea that my friends were right under your noses all along."

"Neither did we," said Darcy, while Stormy shook her head in agreement, "how'd they do that?"

"You have your secrets and so do I," said Olaf, "needless to say, while you were occupied putting those Bureau buffoons in their proper place, my fellow players had grabbed young Klaus and Sunny, whisking them away and replacing them with flawless replicas of them; biological robots exact in every detail."

Olaf looked at Frankie, "you and your fellow freaks and mutants had no idea that you had a pair of imposters among you."

"Enough of this foolish bantering!" said Lucas, "the night wears on and Yog-Sothoth awaits!"

"Last chance, Violet," said Icy as she walked up to the cage, "either you give us the damn book, or we turn Eliza lose on your brother and sister."

"Oh, please, let me play with them," said Eliza, "I've got a car battery, some clamps and sponges waiting in the other room."

"I can shock them without all that stuff," said Stormy.

"Yeah, but it's much more fun when you do it the old fashion way," said Eliza.

Klaus and Sunny looked up at Violet, begging them with their eyes not to give up The Necronomicon, that they weren't important.

But they were important to Violet. They were her brother and sister, her family. If anything would happen to them, it would break her

heart beyond repair.

Violet quickly looked at Solaris, whom, while maintaining a neutral expression to the villains, looked up at Violet with eyes full of hopeless frustration, as if saying that there was nothing she could do.

' But you can do something.'

Violet could now clearly hear the voice in her mind. It sounded like it came from a woman, definitely not from The Necronomicon, yet it was clear as a bell within her head.

' You have the power to save your brother and sister,' said the voice, 'it's right in your hands. Just open the book and you can destroy Olaf once and for all! You can destroy all your enemies in one swift stroke! You can save your new friends and return home with your brother and sister! Just open and read the book!'

Violet looked down at The Necronomicon, at the ancient tome with its dark power locked within its pages.

' That's it,' said the voice, 'just use the book.'

For one moment, the gears in Violet's mind stopped and her heart was in control. For one moment, she was on the verge of giving into temptation. She placed her hand on the front cover of The Necronomicon and started to open it.

But then reason suddenly returned to her. Violet knew that The Necronomicon had the power to destroy her enemies, but at what cost? What price would she have to pay to save the lives of her friends and siblings? Would she have to die as payment for the dark powers she was about to invoke? And was there any guarantee that Frankie, Clair, Klaus and Sunny would even survive whatever horror the book would unleash?

'What are you waiting for?' the voice asked urgently, 'your brother and sister are about to be tortured to death! Read the book if you want them to live!'

"I do want them to live," Violet said aloud.

"What's that you say?" Olaf demanded.

'Then why are you hesitating!?' the voice asked, 'read the book! Destroy Olaf and your brother and sister will live!'

"And I'll lose my soul," said Violet. With that, she threw the book to the floor. It landed on the stone floor with a loud clap that startled everyone.

"Are... are you mad?!" exclaimed Clair, her eyes blazing with betrayed fury, "you just gave them the means to destroy the world and kill us!"

"In reverse order, I hope," said Frankie.

"I... I couldn't do it," said Violet as she sank to her knees in her energy cage, "I couldn't use the book!"

"And it's a good thing you didn't," said Olaf as he picked the book up, cradling it in his hands like it was the most precious thing in existence. He then held it up, displaying it to all the villains in the room, "my friends, at long last, we have The Necronomicon!"

"About damn time," said Icy. "Now let me have it."

"I beg your pardon?" Olaf asked, "why should I give you the book?"

"Because my sisters and I did all the hard work!" said Icy.

"What are we, chopped liver?" Dalton asked.

"If it weren't for us, we wouldn't have acquired the second sacrifice," said Orlando.

"And prevented those mutants and freaks from slicing you witches into itty bitty pieces," said Eliza.

"If anyone should have the book," said Paulette, "it's Lucas."

"We got the damn thing!" snapped Icy, "I should hold it!"

"Who said you should hold it?" Stormy asked.

"Because I'm the eldest," said Icy smugly.

"By two freaking minutes!" snapped Darcy.

"Well if you were so eager to be number one," said Icy irately, "you should have come out first!"

"You kicked me before I could come out!" snapped Darcy, "you cracked one of my ribs!"

"You remember that?" a startled and slightly disgusted Stormy.

"No, but I looked at my medical records when I was nine," said Darcy.

"Well, boo hoo!" said Icy, "little Darcy is suffering from a childhood trauma. It's still not going to get you the book!"

"It won't help you either!" said Darcy.

"It won't help any of you witches!" said Orlando, "Lucas gets the book!"

As the villains began shouting among each other, Violet, Clair and Frankie looked down in amazed confusion. But then Frankie smiled.

"Oh, now I get it," she said. Frankie then looked at Clair, "I get it now," she then looked at Frankie, "you gave them the book so they would start fighting among each other."

"What? No," said Violet, "I gave it up so my brother and sister wouldn't be tortured to death. On the other hand," she looked down at the arguing villains, "I've never been one to turn down a lucky break."

"It'd be wonderful if they'd destroy each other," said Clair. "But I seriously doubt we'd be that lucky."

Sure enough, Olaf restored order among the Monster Haters and The Trix by pulling out an air horn and letting out a deafening blast from it, causing everyone arguing to stop.

"That's better," said Olaf as he tossed the air horn over his shoulder, then held The Necronomicon in both hands, "since none of you squabbling children can act civil among yourselves, I shall keep the book."

"Over my dead body," said Lucas as he cracked his knuckles.

"We did all the hard work," said Icy, "and now you're going to claim all the glory."

"Let's worry about who gets the book after we kill this pompous son of a bitch," said Dalton.

"I'm with you on that," said Darcy, while Stormy nodded in agreement.

"You could destroy me," said Olaf, "but then, all of your efforts would have been in vain."

"What are you talking about?" Orlando asked.

"He's the only one who can perform the ritual," said Solaris.

"Where have you been?" Stormy asked, "I thought you stepped out."

"I have a knack for making myself unnoticed," said Solaris, "anyway, before you go ahead and slaughter Olaf, and his followers, whom

are so fanatically devote to him they'd throw themselves in front of him and let you kill them first. Before you do all that and we have a bloodbath, may I ask if any of you can read Sumerian Cuneiform?"

"What the hell is that?" Eliza asked, "some kind of techno band?"

"It's the language of ancient Summer," said Solaris, "and the language of The Necronomicon, get an education! And judging by Ms. Eliza's answer, I'm convinced that none of you," she looked at The Monster Haters and The Trix, "can read The Necronomicon."

"What? I... oh," said Darcy, "yeah, that would have been a problem."

"You mean we went through all this trouble for a book we couldn't read?" Dalton asked.

"But I can," said Olaf, "and I shall. Trust me, dear friends, we shall all soon receive what we want. Now, dear witches, be so kind as to uncage our 'honored guests.'"

"We'll do it," said Icy, "but we'll be watching you!"

"Damn right," said Stormy, while Darcy nodded in agreement. The three of them then canceled the spells powering the energy cages, dropping Violet, Clair and Frankie to the floor, spraining Clair's ankle, bruising Violet's ribs and popping the stitches on Frankie's left hand. The hand got up on its fingers and tried to scurry away.

"Not on my watch!" shouted Icy. She then trued to freeze the hand but it dodged the cold magic.

Darcy and Stormy also tried to blast it, but they too missed the hand. But then Paulette stomped on it with her booted heel and then stabbed it with a knife, causing Frankie to cry out in pain, "oh my ghou! That hurts!" she shouted as the Monster Haters grabbed her, Violet and Clair, forcing them to stand up.

"That'll teach you to not misbehave," said Paulette as she held the twitching hand up, still impaled on her knife.

"You'd think you'd come up with a better way to hold yourself together," said Icy as she walked over and pulled the hand off of the knife, causing Frankie to cry out in pain again.

"I've got a better way," said Stormy as she took the hand from Icy and walked over to Frankie. Stormy then summoned a staple gun and used it to violently attach Frankie's hand back on, causing her to cry out in pain again and again.

"Wow, that was pretty smart and evil of you, little sis," said Icy.

"I keep telling you and Darcy, I'm no idiot," said Stormy smugly.

"Yes, we're all proud of your intelligence," said Lucas impatiently. He then looked at Olaf, "can we begin now?"

"Without delay," said Olaf. He then gestured to his theater troupe, "take the brats out and keep them locked up! I shall deal with them upon my ascension!"

"No, wait! You said you'd let them go!" shouted Violet as she struggled against the Monster Haters.

"I did no such thing," said Olaf as his minions pushed Klaus and Sunny out of the chamber, "I did say that they would live, and they will live, to see me ascend to godhood!"

Klaus and Sunny looked up at Violet with heartbroken eyes as they were taken out, with Violet looking back at them with equally despaired eyes.

"Thanks a lot, Violet!" exclaimed Clair irately, "you've damned us all!"

"I... I didn't mean to," said Violet in a subdued tone.

"It's not over yet!" said Frankie, "our friends will find us, I know they will!"

"You stupid little freak!" said Dalton, "your fellow freaks and those mutants, they don't know where we are."

"They'll never find us in time to rescue you," said Lucas. Just then one of his followers ran up to him and whispered something in his ear, "what! What do you mean they're outside Belvedere Castle!?"

"They found the entrance to the tunnels, Lucas!" said the hapless Black-Jacket, whom was sweating nervously and cowering in the face of Lucas' wrath.

"How could they have found us so quickly!?" exclaimed Icy, "who are these people!?"

"They're the last people you should have pissed off," said Clair.

"Silence!" shouted Lucas. He then backhanded Clair across the face, severely bruising her left cheek and cutting her lips.

"You bastard!" shouted Violet, "leave her alone!"

"I'll do whatever I want to her," said Lucas, "and there's nothing you can do to stop me!"

"You're going to kill us anyway," said Frankie, "so why hurt her even more?"

Clair spat out some blood and glared at Lucas, "because he's the kind of messed up psychopath who takes pleasure in the pain of others; it's the only way he can feel sexual gratification."

At that Lucas grabbed Clair by the throat, not hard enough to strangle her, but hard enough to get her attention, "if I weren't in a hurry, if Yog-Sothoth didn't need you pure in body, I'd show you what I need for sexual gratification, and believe me, you would not enjoy it."

"We've still got to deal with those loser heroes," said Stormy.

"They'll never locate this chamber in time," said Olaf, "the tunnels are a subterranean labyrinth. They will never solve the secret of it before the ritual is complete!"

"Well, we're going to prepare for them just in case," said Lucas. He then looked at Paulette, Dalton, Orlando and Eliza, "go into the maze and wait for the fools! Do whatever you have to do, but they are not to reach this chamber alive!"

"Same goes for you two!" said Icy to Stormy and Darcy.

"What are you going to do during all this?" Darcy asked.

"Watching the ritual, of course," said Icy.

"Typical," said Stormy, "we do all the real work and you take all the credit!"

"You should be fortunate to get the chance of wiping out the infidels!" said Paulette. She, Dalton and Orlando nodded in acknowledgement to Lucas, "we shall fight to the death! None shall pass into this chamber!" At that all the other Monster Haters nodded in agreement.

"Just so long as I finally get to play with someone," said Eliza.

"Alright, we'll do it," said Stormy. She then glared at Icy, "but you'd better make sure that Yog-Sothoth gives our gifts first!"

"Just so long as you put those loser heroes in their place," said Icy.

"You got it," said Darcy. With that she, Stormy, Paulette, Dalton, Eliza, Orlando and the other Monster Haters, minus three whom were holding Clair, Violet and Frankie, exited the chamber.

"Now we can begin," said Olaf. He then looked at Clair, Violet and Frankie, "I believe a small costume change is appropriate for this act."

The Two White-Faced Women came back in, followed by the Hook-Hand Man and The Pimpled Man, whom were carrying a small wooden trunk. They opened it, revealing three plain white dresses.

"It is fortunate," said Olaf as the Two White-Faced Women took the dresses out, "that you three lovely young ladies are roughly the same size."

"You sick son of a bitch!" snapped Clair as The Hook-Hand Man walked over and began ripping her clothes off, while the Pimpled Man did the same with Frankie.

"You'll never get away with this!" shouted Frankie, while Violet stood there with a defeated look on her face.

"I already have," said Olaf as he smiled wickedly, "I already have."

... Outside Belvedere Castle... Central Park...

"The entrance to the tunnels is here," said Katina as everyone stood to the side of the famous castle structure in the park.

"I don't see anything," said Heath.

"But there's something here," said Howleen, "I... I can feel it."

"I feel it too," said Clawdeen, while Clawd nodded in agreement.

"There's a definite disturbance in the natural balance," said Venus, "dark magic."

"Yeah, but where?" Sora asked.

"Here!" Shawn shouted as he pointed to a seemingly ordinary patch of grass, "the entrance is here!" he then sent a mild psychic pulse into the ground. The grass shimmered and vanished, revealing a set of stone stairs descending into the earth.

"How did you know to do that?" Abbey asked.

"I can sense Clair, Violet and Frankie," said Shawn, "now that we're close enough, I can navigate my way through all the interference mojo the enemy has been putting out."

"We're going to need your Tracking on this for sure," said Max, "if Katina's right, then there's a huge maze down there."

"One so big that we could search for hours and never find the girls or the book," said Katina.

"And it's probably loaded with more booby traps," said Felicia.

"No, no more traps," said Katina, "the enemy hasn't had time to prepare any," she closed her eyes in concentration, "but the majority of our enemies are in the maze, waiting for us."

"They're going to try and slow us down," said Malcolm.

"They'll do more than slow us down," said Lilith, "knowing Lucas, he's probably ordered Paulette, Dalton, Orlando, Eliza and the others to fight to the death. These guys are serious about stopping us, fighting with everything they have and more in hopes of taking at least one of us with them when they die."

"I doubt The Trix would be so eager to fight to the finish," said Riku, "they'll run away if things start to go bad for them."

"Not this time," said Jill, "there'll be no escape for any of our enemies tonight. Either we catch them or kill them."

"Hopefully in that order," said Laura, "paperwork and ethical issues, you know."

"But the red tape goons wouldn't be upset if we cut off one of the witches' heads, right?" Tess asked.

"You really want to cut their heads off," said Riku.

"We couldn't destroy them last time," said Tess, "so we might as well do it this time."

"You're hell bent on beheading a witch," said Max, "well, just so you know, personally killing one of your enemies, just for spite, isn't something you want on your conscious."

"It'll haunt you day and night," said Jill, "righteous justifiable homicide is one thing, but revenge killing, spite killing, that'll rip your heart apart."

"This coming from someone who was so willing to slice The Trix up into little pieces?" Steven asked.

"I was pissed that Violet was taken," said Jill, "and I'm still pissed, even more now that we've been duped about Klaus and Sunny. But I'm in control now. I want The Trix dead, but only after they're convicted in a fair trial."

"But if we have to kill them in order to rescue the girls and recover The Necronomicon? What then?" Laura asked.

"I won't shed a tear for them," said Jill, "the same goes for Lucas and his ilk. And Olaf too."

"Alright," said Tess, "I'll play it that way," she then muttered, "for now."

"So," said Jackson as he looked down into the stairs leading to the underground maze, "who's going first?"

"Not you, that's for sure," said Patricia. She then looked at Chad, "and neither are you. You're both staying topside."

"What!?" exclaimed both Jackson and Chad.

"She's right," said Kairi, "I'm sorry, guys, but you can't come with us."

"But why?" Jackson asked, "Clair's down there!"

"So is Frankie!" said Chad.

"Which is why you two need to stay up here," said Max, "forgive me for being blunt, but you two would only get in the way."

"You're not Meta Humans, nor Monsters," said Riku, "and you certainly don't have Keyblades."

"Unless you two have been holding out on us," said Cleo in a suspicious tone.

"Uh, no, sorry," said Chad modestly, "no special powers or abilities here."

"I happen to be half Monster!" shouted Jackson.

"Yeah, your other half is a chaotic DJ with prankster complex," said Laura.

"I'm sorry, Jackson," said Lagoona, "but having Holt down there would only make things worse."

"Holt isn't that bad," said Jackson stubbornly, "and I can definitely help! Just give me a gun or something!"

"Do you even know how to handle a firearm?" Steven asked.

"I'm a fast learner," said Jackson as he straightened his glasses.

"How hard could it be?" Chad asked, "just point at the bad guy and pull the trigger."

"This isn't a video game, kido," said Felicia, "this is real life or death stuff we're messing with. Do you actually think you could kill someone? Even someone as wicked as those we've faced tonight?"

"Well?" Julia asked Jackson, "can you kill to save the one you love?"

"I... I don't know," said Jackson in an uncertain tone, "I... I just want to save Clair."

"I know you do," said Patricia, "which is why I'll be needing you and Chad up here to help coordinate things."

"You can assist me with the computer system," said Tyler, "my battle suit won't be much use underground."

"And I can use your help with communicating with the rescue team," said J.D. to Chad.

"I am good with computers," said Jackson in a more positive tone.

"Just teach me all that technical communication lingo," said Chad.

"We'll be talking straight and to the point for this," said J.D.

"Cool," said Chad, "but, I wish I could do more."

"The best thing you can do is to wish everyone luck," said Lagoona.

"And you won't be alone up here either," said Cleo, "Ghoulia will stay up to help," she then looked at the zombie genius, "right?"

At that Ghoulia gave the thumbs up and sat down to network her laptop with the Bureau computers.

"Then there's nothing else to say except for good luck," said Patricia, "and kick some evil ass!"

"Alright!" said Aiden as he pressed his wrists, "let's do this!"

At that Kairi blinked in confusion, "what... what did you just say? Alvin?"

"She's not supposed to remember us yet," Riku whispered to Aiden.

"I know that!" Aiden hissed. He then looked at Kairi, "uh... it's just my good luck saying."

"Oh, cool," said Kairi.

"That was tense," said Tess, "for a second I thought she was going to remember and go crazy again."

"We've got to be careful," said Riku.

"But for how long?" Sora asked, "how much longer do we have to be strangers to her?"

"Until we figure out exactly what Maleficent did to her," said Malcolm.

"And how long will that take?" Roxas asked.

"I don't know," said Malcolm, "but I'll get right to work as soon as we're done with this current crisis."

"Speaking of which," said Naminé, "shouldn't we be heading underground by now?"

"Nearly everyone else has," said Aiden.

Sure enough, most of The Bureau operatives and Monsters had descended the stairs, with Kairi, Clawdeen and Julia heading down.

"Oh, man!" said Sora, "wait up!" With that he, Riku, Tess, Malcolm, Aiden, Roxas and Naminé, hurried to the stairs.

It wasn't long before they were all underground and in a large square chamber lit by orange torches. Three tunnels branched off on the sides of the room.

"Which way, Shawn?" Max asked.

Shawn walked to each of the tunnels, pausing and sensing at each one. He then pointed at the one on the right, "this way," he said.

"Lead on," said Cleo, "and we shall follow!"

"But carefully," said Kairi, "those junkies and witches are waiting for us."

"That's why we'll go first," said Steven, while Mark, Julia and Felicia, nodded in agreement.

"Count me in too," said Clawd, while Deuce, Clawdeen, Heath and Abbey, nodded in agreement.

"We'll stomp those baddies into charcoal!" said Heath as his hair flared up.

"Easy with that fire, big boy!" said Hezekiah, "we don't know about the air down here."

"We've got plenty of air," said Jana, "just look at the torches," she then looked at Aiden, Roxas and Naminé, "he can be a bit dim sometimes."

"Not always!" said Hezekiah. "I just get a bit confused sometimes, that's all."

"Nobody's perfect," said Tara. She then held up her wand, "*Lumos !*" the tip of her wand lit up with a bright white light, "just in case there's anything hiding in the shadows." With that she, Shawn, Mark, Julia, Felicia, Deuce, Clawd, Clawdeen, Heath and Abbey went first into the tunnel, with everyone else following.

... **Hogwarts...**

"Makes you wonder," said Ron as he, Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Aaron, Ashley, Max, Leon, Andrew, Jill and Draco, watched the rescue team on the viewer, "why our Shawn is the way he is and that Shawn is different."

"You mean why that Shawn is a Tracker and ours is a Scanner?" Aaron asked, "who knows? Perhaps the other Shawn has a different ancestor in his family than ours. Maybe a random mutation in his DNA, or perhaps he's just different, plain and simple. I'd need more information before giving a reliable answer."

"Why did my other self die in the other world?" Andrew asked, "why are all the alternate universes we've encountered different from one another? Fate, chance, divine intervention, or maybe that's just how reality is made."

"That's what makes our work so dangerous and exciting," said Leon, "you never know what to expect."

"If it's so dangerous," said Draco, "then why do it at all?"

"Because if we don't do it, who will?" Jill asked. "You wizards? You've got your own problems to deal with. Mortals? I mean Muggles. All in all, they're stupid and completely unreliable until they're threatened with life or death."

"Muggles aren't all that bad," said Hermione.

"I know," said Jill, "but even after all the good we have done, all the problems we've solved, humans still foolishly destroy each other, while all we can do is our very best to keep civilization, humanity, the world itself, from falling apart."

"I'll drink to that," said Leon as he raised a glass of mead to his lips. He happily swallowed, "this is excellent! Where's it from?"

"The Three Broomsticks," said Ginny, "Hanna got the recipe from Madam Rosemerta."

"I'll have to remember to order a case or two for my birthday," said Leon as he happily drank more.

"You have a drinking problem, old friend," said Max, "and I thought you wrote that letter to your other self to help him be less of an alcoholic."

"First of all," said Leon, "I am not an alcoholic. I can stop any time I want." He then placed the glass on the table, "there, see? Second, I did give advice to my other self, but just to warn him to be careful on his birthdays. Besides, if I hadn't gotten drunk on my birthday, I wouldn't have met my girlfriend."

"You mean that gorgeous nurse at the emergency room?" Jill asked.

"The same," said Leon. "What'd you write to your other self? And you too, Max."

"Just advice to ease some loneliness," said Max, "it's not every day you can give yourself a second chance at love."

"Same with my other self," said Jill, "but not in the same way as the other Max."

Just then James, Albus, Scorpio, Izzy, Rose, Mathew, Alison, Kylie, Nathaniel, Cass, Yasmine, Lancaster, Cordelia and Ryo, ran into the room, followed by Angelina, Cho and Neville, the last three looking rather cross with the young students.

"Is Tara alright?" Kylie asked, "did she and the others make it to the other world?"

"They're fine," said Harry, "they all made it and found Sora and the others."

"But what about Kairi?" Rose asked.

"She's... more or less alright," said Ron.

"Oh, be honest with your daughter, Weasley," said Draco, "I've never lied to my son."

"I'm not lying, Malfoy!" said Ron. He then looked at Rose, "Kairi is alright. She... just had to... forget Sora and the others for a little while, that's all."

"There are times," said Cho to Angelina in a hushed tone, "when I wonder how Harry survived it all with Ron for a friend."

"They had Hermione to balance it out," said Angelina, "but that's just my opinion." She then looked at the students, "there, you've been assured that everyone is alright. Now, would you all be so kind as to return to your classes?"

"You're all lucky that Professor McGonagall is in a Floo Powder conference with Minister Shacklebolt," said Neville, "if she saw your little walk-out stunt, she'd feed you all to a flock of Narggles."

"What are Nargles?" Ryo asked. "They're not in The Monster Book of Monsters."

"I'll have to ask Aunt Luna in my next letter," said Albus.

"I'm sorry, Professor Longbottom," said Cass, "Professor Connor, Professor Johnson-Weasley, but we can't go back to class, not now."

"Our friends are clearly heading towards a climatic battle," said Mathew as he pointed at the viewer, "we have to stay and watch, we just have to."

"You're supposed to be in my Transfiguration class!" said Angelina.

"And you're supposed to be in my History of Magic class," said Cho as she looked at Alison.

"Oh, let them skip a class," said Ashley, "it's the last period of the day, so what's the harm?"

"I hate to endorse any excuse to skive off of class," said Hermione, "but this is an unusual circumstance."

"Come on, Professors? Please? Just this once?" Izzy asked.

"We'll clear it with McGonagall if she asks," said Harry.

"Well, this is Sora and the others we're talking about," said Neville hesitantly.

"And it's a chance to see an alternate version of The Ramblers in action," said Cho, "and those fantastic Monsters."

"Just don't tell Hagrid," said Angelina, "he'd want to immigrate to this other world," she then looked at Kylie and the other students, "alright, you lot, you can stay and watch."

At that all the students cheered happily.

"But I want you all to complete all the work you missed as soon as the crisis has passed!" said Angelina, "and not one word of this to Professor McGonagall."

"Our lips are sealed!" said James eagerly. He then pulled out his wand and used it to seal up the mouths of Izzy, Rose, Cass, Kylie, Alison and Yasmine.

"JAMES!" exclaimed Harry, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Angelina, Cho and Neville.

"What?" James asked innocently, "it's just a mild adhesive spell. It'll wear off with water, promise."

"You're lucky I'm not writing to your grandmother," said an irate Ginny as she, Hermione and Angelina used their wands to produce tiny jets of water that unsealed the mouths of the girls, "if she were here, she'd clean your clock!"

"And I'd have to fix it," said Aaron.

"I thought repairs were my specialty," said Andrew, "and before I forget, I'll send word to the kitchen to send dinner up to us," he then

looked at the viewer, "if I'm right, things are about to get super serious."

... Beneath Central Park...

"Are you sure you know where you're going, Shawn?" Julia asked as she screwed on a set of silencers to her pistols. Our heroes and allies had been following Shawn for several minutes, through twists and turns in the maze. They came to a part of the tunnel where it widened for them all to walk through comfortably and still had room to spare.

"Of course he knows where he's going," said Laura, "he's locked in on Violet, Clair and Frankie."

"He hasn't lead us to a dead end yet," said Sora, "so we've got to be going the right way."

"I'm not worried about getting lost," said Max, "I'm more concerned as to why we haven't run into any of the enemy yet."

"They're here alright," said Katina as she looked around warily, "they're just getting into position to attack us. Not to mention that the Soma-99 users are juicing up, getting an extra fix in before they try to murder us."

"Didn't Solaris' letter say that the more those maniacs use the drug, the more dependent it becomes?" Cleo asked.

"They soon become slow and weak," said Abbey, "like drinking too much fermented yak milk."

"But how soon till they become weak enough for us to beat them?" Draculaura asked.

Just then Jill tensed up, "look out!" she shouted as she pulled Cleo out of the way of an incoming knife. Paulette appeared from a hidden

door, her hands grasping more knives.

"Infidels!" shouted Paulette, "you shall die for your blasphemy!"

"Blasphemy is so overrated," said Felicia as she pulled out her knives, "you want to play with sharp objects? Fine with me!" she then grinned eagerly, "let's dance!"

"Permit me to lead!" shouted Paulette as she threw a knife at Felicia, whom dodged it, countered with a throwing knife of her own and then rushed at Paulette. The two of them furiously tried to stab and cut each other, both of them blocking and avoiding the others deadly blades.

Just then Stormy, Darcy, Dalton, Orlando, the other Monster Haters, appeared, "kill them all!" shouted Dalton as he and the other maniacs rushed in, while the two witches provided spell support.

"Kill this!" shouted Deuce as he lowered his glasses, petrifying one of the Monster Haters, then dodged a punch aimed at his head. Clawd, Clawdeen and Howleen were each fighting one of the maniacs, as was Toralei, Lagoona, Gill, Heath, Abbey, Draculaura, Steven, Mark, Jill, Max, Sora, Riku, Kairi, Aiden, Tess, Malcolm and Roxas. Naminé, Cleo, Venus, Operetta, Rochelle, Rebecca and Julia were waiting for their chance to attack, while Aaron waited in the middle of the group, waiting for a patient to heal. All the while our heroes and allies were dodging malicious darkness and weather-based spells from Darcy and Stormy.

"I've got to admit!" said Gill as he dodged a punch aimed at him, then kicked his attacker, "this is kinda exciting!"

"More exciting than surfing a tsunami?" Lagoona asked as she jumped over her opponent and kicked him in the back.

"I'll just stick to SCREAM and other Monster sports, thanks," said Deuce as dodged a kick, then punched his opponent.

"You ought to try Struggle!" said Roxas as he bashed one Monster Hater in the head with his Keyblades, then another.

"Oh, I know Struggle!" said Kairi as she healed a cut on Steven's shoulder, then bashed a Monster Hater in the head, "have you been to Twilight Town?"

"Uh... from time to time," said Roxas hesitantly.

"Less jabbering!" shouted Abbey as she froze one Monster Hater, then dodged a bolt of dark lightning, "more kicking the baddies in the booties!"

Yet for all the efforts of our heroes and allies, all the damage they inflicted on the Monster Haters was negated each time one of them took another dose of Soma-99.

"We're gonna burn ourselves out at this rate!" said Heath as he set one of the Monster Haters on fire, then dodged a confusing spell.

"Topside!" shouted Max into his com link, "any suggestions!?"

... Outside Belvedere Castle...

"I've got plenty of suggestions, Max," said Patricia as she stood in front of the makeshift computer station that Ghoulia, Tyler and Jackson had set up. Patricia then angrily shouted into her com link, "get off your franking asses and kill those maniacs!"

"I thought you wanted them alive," said Jackson.

"Well, that was then," said Patricia, "now that I know for sure that these degenerates are on a suicide mission, I won't let them kill my friends. Max, you and the others have permission to go all out."

"All out?" Chad asked, "what does that mean?"

"It means," said Tyler as he smiled eagerly, "that The Ramblers are going to get serious."

... Beneath Central Park...

"You heard the boss!" shouted Max, "Ramblers! Let's Get Rambling!"

"Yeah!" shouted the other Ramblers. With that they began fighting harder, inflicting more damage on the Monster Haters.

"Our Ramblers don't have such a cool battle cry," said Jana as she found herself fighting back to back with Tess, her long combat knife dripping with spilled enemy blood.

"I never put much thought into battle cries," said Tess as she bashed a Monster Hater in the head, then swung her Keyblade to break another's ribs, "but I'll keep it in mind from now on."

"Is it me," said Aiden as he found himself next to Sora as they fought the Monster Haters, "but are these creeps getting stronger?"

"They are getting harder to hurt!" said Sora.

"It's the drug!" shouted Laura as she, Katina and Shawn fired off psychic blast after psychic blast, "they're still high on it!"

"We've got to hold them till they adapt to it and start to fade!" said Steven as he found himself facing Dalton, whom was trying to catch him in a bear hug and shatter his bones.

"But how long will that take?" Mark asked as he dodged a fire blast from Orlando.

... The Sacrificial Chamber...

"I hope you're satisfied, you perverts!" shouted Clair as she, Violet and Frankie, now wearing the simple white dresses, were chained to

the altar in the middle of the chamber.

"Ripping off our clothes, seeing us naked," said a seriously embarrassed Frankie, "I'd rather be buried alive in slime!"

"You think you're suffering now?" Icy asked, "just wait till Yog-Sothoth gets here!"

"I know, he's gonna eat us," said Clair. "We know already."

"You simple girl," said Olaf, "you shall not simply be a meal for Yog-Sothoth. No, The Great Intelligence has a far more... interesting fate in store for you."

"Being an inter-dimensional god can be so lonely," said Lucas, "Yog-Sothoth has desires that he will want fulfilled. Upon your deaths, your souls and hearts shall be bound unto him as his concubines!"

"WHAT!?" exclaimed Frankie, "you can't do that! I don't want to be a sex slave to an Outer God!"

"Neither do I!" shouted Clair as she struggled against the chains holding her to the altar, "I've had enough of this lemonade stand! I want out!"

"Me too!" shouted Frankie as she also struggled against the chains, her neck bolts sparking furiously. Yet none of their efforts paid off as the chains held firm.

"Save your strength for when Yog-Sothoth gets here," said Icy, "I hear he likes his playthings feisty."

At that Clair spat at Icy, hitting her face with a big glob of saliva, "go screw him yourself!" she shouted.

Icy retaliated by hitting Clair across the face, then slapped her again, "spit on me again and I'll sew your lips shut!"

"Same goes for you, freak, if you try anything," said Lucas to Frankie. He then looked at Violet, "and you. Well? Have you nothing to say?"

All this time, Violet had remained silent and passive as her clothes were ripped off, as she was forced into the white dress and chained to the altar, a defeated look of hopeless despair on her face.

"Come now, Violet," said Olaf, "we've been through too much for the play to end with you being silent. Say something, the audience is waiting."

"There's no audience, you horrible, crazy man!" shouted Frankie.

"Hey, we're the audience," said Icy, while Lucas, his followers and Olaf's theater troupe nodded in agreement.

"Well, Violet?" Olaf asked, "what have you to say?"

At that Violet looked at Olaf, her eyes brimming with tears as she whimpered, "please, let Klaus and Sunny go."

"What's that?" Olaf asked, "I can't hear you. Say it again!"

"Let Klaus and Sunny go!" cried Violet, tears now falling freely from her eyes, "you've won! I admit it, you've won, so let Klaus and Sunny go, please!"

"Oh my ghoul," said Frankie in a subdued tone, "I... I think she's broken."

"You son of a bitch!" raged Clair, "how dare you break Violet!"

"I think it's rather satisfying," said Icy smugly, "seeing such a resistive heart succumb to her doom."

"That's right, insult me," said Violet, "beat me, torture me, rape me before you sacrifice me! I don't care!" she looked at Olaf, "I'll sign over my inheritance if that's what it takes! Just let Klaus and Sunny

go! Please, show some mercy! Show that you have some humanity in you, please!"

"No," said Olaf plainly, "what need for I of humanity when I am on the verge of becoming a living god? I will not release your pathetic brother and sister. In fact," he smiled wickedly, "I think I'll let them watch," he then gestured to The Pimpled Man and The Hook-Hand Man, "go fetch the other orphans."

"Why?" Lucas asked as the two actors left the chamber, "what's the point of making them watch?"

"You've got a lot to learn about villainy, my dear boy," said Olaf.

"It's simple," said Icy as she smiled maliciously, "Olaf wants sweet little Violet to know that her brother and sister will watch her be consumed and violated by Yog-Sothoth."

"Little Klaus, always the scholar," said Olaf, "he will benefit from observing the ritual. And of course, the little monkey, her education in the carnal arts will have to start sometime."

At that something snapped inside Violet, something that lit the fires of hate and rage in her heart that burned away her hopelessness, "no," she said grimly, her eyes glaring hatefully at Olaf, "you won't do that to Klaus and Sunny. I'm going to find a way out of this, Olaf. I'm going to get out of these chains, and then, I'm going to kill you."

At that Olaf, Lucas and Icy laughed viciously for several seconds, while Solaris walked towards the altar.

Olaf finally calmed down to speak coherently, "you, kill me?" he asked while still chortling, "sweet, innocent, little Violet, murder me? This is bad comedy."

"Then why are you laughing?" Solaris asked as she reached the altar and stood in front of Violet, whom she then glared down at, "and you, sacrifice!" she then slapped Violet across the face, then

brushed her hand across Violet's, "you shouldn't make idle threats if you don't have anything to back them up!"

Solaris backed away from Violet, then winked at her. Violet then realized that Solaris had passed something to her, something that turned out to be a small metal file. Violet gave Solaris the slightest of nods, signaling that she knew what to do.

"Well, this has been mildly entertaining," said Olaf as he walked over to stone pulpit that had been brought in for the ritual and placed The Necronomicon on it, "but the night wears on. The time of sacrifice is at hand!" He then opened the book.

A sinister gust of wind came out of nowhere and blew through the chamber, nearly extinguishing the torches and raising goose bumps on everyone in the room.

"That was ominous," said Icy as she rubbed her arms.

"I call it a sign of our assured success!" said Lucas, "Olaf! Begin the ritual at once!"

"With pleasure," said Olaf as he flipped through the pages of The Necronomicon, "I just need to find the spell," he flipped through more pages, and then still more, "hmmm, there seems to be a bit of a problem here."

"You mean you don't know where in the book the spell is?" Icy asked in an exasperated tone.

"Would I be thumbing through the book if I did!?" Olaf exclaimed, "if you want to find the spell, come up here and try!"

"I would if I could read Sumerian," said Lucas in an annoyed tone, "but you're the only one here who can, so get to it already!"

Solaris then walked over to the altar and whispered to Violet, Clair and Frankie, "we seem to have a little more time than I thought," she

then passed metal files to Clair and Frankie without Olaf and the other baddies noticing, "I'll do whatever else I can to stall them. Work on those chains, but don't try to break out of them until I give the signal. We must give Patricia and the others time to get here."

"Just keep them from looking at us," said Violet as she began to carefully file through the chains securing her wrists.

At that Solaris gave Violet a reassuring smile, "glad to know that you weren't truly broken."

"I couldn't take it any more," said Violet, "I couldn't let that vile man hurt Klaus and Sunny." She then looked up at Solaris with renewed hope in her eyes, "try to get them out of here, no matter what happens. Please, keep my brother and sister safe."

"I'll do what I can," said Solaris, "I swear, no harm will befall Klaus and Sunny if I can help it."

"What about us?" Clair asked as she and Frankie filed through their chains.

"I'll help you too," said Solaris, "but again, we must give our rescuers time to get here." She then looked up at the pulpit, where Lucas and Icy were arguing with Olaf, "Remind me to thank those three in hell for giving our friends such a welcomed head start."

... The Tunnels...

"Am I the only one who sensed that ominous wind just now?" Venus asked as she waited for a chance to throw some confusing pollen at the enemy. Our heroes and allies valiantly battled the Monster Haters and the two witches, but the enemy showed no sign of tiring, while Sora and the others were beginning to feel the strain of their prolonged fight.

"You mean that weird gust that felt like certain doom?" Operetta asked, "that sounded like a choir of sore-throated demons? Yeah, I felt it."

"They must have opened The Necronomicon!" shouted Katina, "they're beginning the ritual! We've got to get there!" she then sent a massive psychic blast at Orlando, slamming him against the rock wall, only for him to get back up. Operetta then sent another sonic pulse at the ceiling, causing a small avalanche that partly buried Orlando.

"That ought to slow down that ornery son of an ox!" said Operetta. She then laughed, "you see, it's funny because oxen can't have calves, right? Right?" she then looked at Venus and Rebecca, whom weren't laughing at all.

"This is hardly the time for jocularly," said Rebecca. She then saw an opening in the fray, "excuse me!" she then activated her steam jet boots and rushed in, delivering a massive punch that broke a Monster Hater's jaw.

"Sheesh," said Operetta as she stubbornly crossed her arms, "you try to diffuse the tension with a little joke and you get your head bitten off by an irate catfish."

"Must be a pretty big catfish to do that," said Venus.

"Ain't it just," said Operetta. She then looked at Draculaura, whom had been strangely quiet throughout the battle. "Are you alright, sugar?" Operetta asked Draculaura, who was looking increasingly uncomfortable as the battle went on.

"All this spilled blood," said Venus, "I know it's tainted blood, but how can you stand to smell it?"

"I'm breathing through my mouth," said Draculaura, "but I could care less about the drugged-up blood," she then looked at Clawd, whom

had just thrown a Monster Hater against the wall with enough force to shatter bones, then broke both arms of another enemy.

"It's Clawd!" said a worried Draculaura, "I'm scared he'll get hurt!"

They all then winced as Clawd kicked a Monster Hater in the crotch, then broke the legs of another.

"I'm more worried about the enemy getting hurt," said Rochelle.

" *Oui*," said Rochelle, "one almost pities them."

Just then one of Darcy's spells nearly hit Rochelle. She dodged it, then glared at the dark witch, "oh, no, you didn't!" she shouted irately. She then few into the fray, shoving enemies and allies aside as she forced her way to Darcy.

"You, witch!" Rochelle shouted, "your wickedness ends here and now!"

"Oh?" Darcy asked daringly, "and you're going to stop me?" She then laughed viciously.

"I would shame myself if I didn't try to stop you," said Rochelle, "as a gargoyle, I am honored bound to stand firm against evil, to guard the innocent and protect the helpless. You, witch, are the embodiment of all that my kind abhors; chaos, selfishness, cruelty, and overall wickedness! You must be stopped!" With that she flew at Darcy, whom dodged her attack and took flight herself.

"You should stay on the ground like a good statue!" said Darcy as she blasted Rochelle, whom endured the attack and then rushed at Darcy. The witch dodged the attack, then cast a spell that multiplied herself, making six Darcy's where there was one.

"Try and stop us now!" shouted all six Darcy's.

"I don't have to," said Rochelle, "not alone that is!"

Operetta then let out a sonic pulse aimed at the ceiling that sent down enough rocks to not only harass the Monster Haters on the ground, but also to disorient all six copies of Darcy. One rock hit one in the head, the real Darcy, disrupting her concentration long enough for Rochelle to tackle her. The two of them grappled in midair.

"That's it, Rochelle!" shouted Venus, "rip her head off!"

"No, don't rip her head off!" said Cleo as she rummaged through her purse, "I have just the curse for that horrible witch! Now, where's that idol? Ah! Here it is!" she then pulled out a small statue of a frog made out of emeralds, sapphires and amber.

"Let's see that witch cast spells when she's a frog!" shouted Cleo as she pressed the amber eyes of the frog statue. The mouth of the frog statue opened up and shot a beam of green magic at Darcy, but at the last second, Darcy twisted out of the way.

The beam of magic barely missed Rochelle and ricochet off the tunnel wall, hitting Clawd and turning him into a three-eyed frog.

"OH MY GHOUL!" exclaimed a horrified Draculaura.

"CLEO!" exclaimed Rochelle, Venus and Rebecca.

"Uh... sorry?" an highly embarrassed Cleo said.

Just then one of the Monster Haters grabbed frog-Clawd and began to squeeze the life out of him.

"NO! CLAWD!" shouted Draculaura. In a flash, she morphed into a black and purple bat, flew over to the Monster Hater that had frog-Clawd, morphed back to her humanoid form and grabbed the Monster Hater by the forearms with enough strength to shatter his bones. Screaming in pain, the maniac dropped frog-Clawd, whom hopped away, while Draculaura grabbed a rock and hit the Monster Hater in the head with enough force to knock him to the ground.

"Don't you hurt my Clawd, you horrible, horrible jerk!" shouted Draculaura as she continued to smash the rock into the Monster Hater's head, completely caving in his skull and reducing his brain into a bloody mush.

Lagoona broke away from her fight and grabbed Draculaura by the shoulder, restraining her, "Hey, it's alright!" said Lagoona, "you got him, he's dead!" She then scooped up frog-Clawd, "and Clawd's okay too, for a frog that is."

"Huh? I... oh," said Draculaura as she looked down at the dead maniac. She then dropped the rock and took frog-Clawd in her arms, tears falling from her eyes, "oh, Clawd! I... I..."

"Hey, I think they're starting to weaken!" shouted Steven as he broke the arms and legs of the Monster Hater he was fighting, then his opponent's legs. The maniac fell down and didn't get back up again.

"Now I know they're weakening!" shouted Felicia as she forced Paulette on the defensive, scoring several minor cuts on the female Monster Hater.

"You miserable freak!" shouted Paulette as she barely dodged a cut, then threw one of her knives at Felicia. She then administered another dose of Soma-99, but it barely healed her wounds, "no! I don't believe it!" she then administered another dose, but the effect was barely noticeable.

"The jig is up, bitch!" shouted Felicia. She then sidestepped to the right, faked back to the left and then stabbed Paulette in her right elbow, then cut off Paulette's left fingers. Screaming in pain, Paulette fell to the ground and didn't get back up.

"One chance!" said Felicia as she readied her knives for a final cut, "give up or die!"

"No! Don't kill me!" cried Felicia, her eyes betraying her fear, "Please! I quit! I surrender!"

Just then Dalton appeared and snapped Felicia's neck. She collapsed to the ground, stone dead.

"Those who surrender betray Lucas!" shouted Dalton as he threw a punch at Felicia, whom dodged it, "And those who betray Lucas shall die for their blasphemy!"

But then Mark stabbed Dalton in the back with his sword, "you really ought to get your spiritual priorities in order, pal," said Mark. He then pulled out his sword, only to dodge a kick from Dalton.

"They're not all weakening at once!" shouted Sora as he, Kairi, Riku, Aiden, Tess, Malcolm and Roxas still fought their opponents.

"Well of course not," said Aaron as he bandaged a cut on Jana's shoulder, while Hezekiah provided cover, "they've all got different metabolic rates. It'll be a while before they all fully adapt to the drug and it becomes worthless to them!"

"So, you losers are exploiting a weakness in our allies!" said Darcy as she dodged a punch from Rochelle, "I'm not surprised."

"Lucas is an idiot!" shouted Stormy as she sent out multiple bolts of lightning, "even we know that drugs are bad, too bad!" She then began forming a tornado that flashed with lightning and sent it at our heroes and allies, forcing them to dodge and allowing the weakening Monster Haters to regroup.

"Wish those two would weaken already!" shouted Aiden. He then transmuted the ground beneath a Monster Hater into spikes, impaling him, then transmuted more ground into a stone pillar, which another Monster Hater ran smack into.

"As if we'd weaken!" shouted Stormy, "my sisters and I are invincible!"

"The hell you are!" shouted Malcolm as he aimed his Keyblade at Stormy and shot a beam of his own dark magic at her. She

countered with a beam of her own dark magic that crackled with lightning. The two beams met and tried to overpower each other, but Stormy's beam was slightly stronger, forcing Malcolm's beam back.

But then Tara jumped in and fired off a beam of red magic from her wand, adding her power to Malcolm and the two of them forced Stormy's beam back. The dark witch poured everything she had into her beam, her brow slick with sweat, while at the same time, her power-enhancing item on her arm began to crack as inch by inch, her beam was forced back to her hands.

But then Stormy's item exploded, severely burning her arm. At the same time her beam stopped and she was hit by both beams from Malcolm and Tara, sending her slamming against the wall and knocking her down.

"And that's how we do things at Hogwarts," said Tara as she twirled her wand between her fingers.

Stormy then struggled to her feet, clutching her burned arm and gasping for breath, "screw... this!" she panted, "I'm... outta here!" with that she teleported out.

"Stormy!" shouted an appalled Darcy as she saw her sister flee. She was then punched in the face by Rochelle and knocked to the ground.

Tess and Kairi threw their Keyblades at Darcy, hitting the dark witch, whom was then punched in the stomach by Rebecca, then slashed across the face by both Clawdeen and Toralei and finally, petrified by Deuce.

"Two witches down," said Deuce as he replaced his glasses.

But then Darcy broke out of the petrification, looking incredibly irate as blood dripped from her scratches, "you filthy freaks!" she snapped, "you ruined my face!" she then shot a paralyzing spell at Deuce, knocking him to the ground unable to move.

Darcy then shot blinding and paralyzing spells across the room, leaving Rochelle, Kairi and Clawdeen unable to see, while disabling Rebecca, Tess and Toralei.

Darcy then looked at her power-enhancing item and saw that it too was cracking. She then ripped it off her arm and threw it away. It hit the wall and exploded.

"I think Stormy had the right idea by running," said Darcy, "but not before I finish off a few of you losers!" She then prepared a sphere of dark magic, "I'm still strong enough to kill some of you!"

Just then there was a double earsplitting bang. Julia had fired off both barrels of her Nitro Express rifle and both bullets hit Darcy in the chest, blasting massive holes in her torso and dropping her to the ground, stone dead.

"Justice aside," said Julia as she loaded fresh cartridges into her rifle, "that was for John and Rebecca."

... The Sacrificial Chamber... a few minutes ago...

"My sisters and I stole the book!" shouted Icy.

"But you didn't get it away from Violet!" Lucas shouted, "the only think you witches have done is lounge around while my people did all the real fighting!"

"You junkies couldn't fight your way out of a plastic bag!" snapped Icy.

"If they keep this up, they'll destroy each other," said Clair in a hushed tone as she, Violet and Frankie, worked the metal files against their chains, slowly but surely weakening the metal links.

"It'd be great if we could be that lucky," muttered Violet.

"I'll just be happy if they ignore us until we're ready to break free," said Frankie, "I just hope Cleo and the others get here soon."

"I just hope Solaris is genuine," said Clair, "'cause if she's just messing with us, if she really is working with Olaf, then I'm gonna rip her head off."

"Just so long as you save Olaf for me," said Violet, "I meant it when I said I'd kill him. He's been hurting my brother, sister and I for far too long. It ends tonight, one way or another."

"I'd help you," said Frankie, "really, I would help you kill him. I've never been so angry with anyone in my life. I never thought I'd hate anyone as much as I hate Olaf, but he is the most despicable, vile, disgusting, inhumane Normie in the world."

"If you hate him so much, why won't you help kill him?" Clair asked.

"Because I'm running out of electricity," said Frankie, "I charged up this afternoon, before Kairi and I went to the club opening," she paused in thought, "feels like it's been days instead of hours. Seriously, I feel like I've been awake for days. If I don't get some volts into me soon, I'll pass out and I'll just be dead weight."

"I don't suppose Solaris has a car battery up her sleeve," said Violet. She then looked around, "where is Solaris?"

The three captive girls then heard Olaf shouting above the arguing Icy and Lucas. "Enough of this pointless prater! I am the only one among us who can read The Necronomicon, therefore I shall be keeping it in my confidence!"

"You can't even find the right spell!" said Icy in an accusing tone, "you don't know anything about dark magic, do you!"

"As if your magic has been helpful at all this evening," said Lucas.

Just then Solaris, whom had been standing behind the three villains, spoke up, "if I may interject..."

Icy, Lucas and Olaf then all jumped and shouted with startled surprise when Solaris spoke. The three of them then glared irately at Solaris.

"Will you kindly not do that, woman!?" exclaimed Olaf.

"Didn't anyone tell you not to scare people like that?" Icy asked.

"As if my nerves needed to be more strained," said Lucas.

"Well, it's your fault for ignoring me," said Solaris in a disapproving tone, "just look at the three of you; bickering among yourselves like preteen girls over which member of the latest boy band is the most cute. You call yourselves villains? You shame me to even be in your company!"

"How dare you!" exclaimed Olaf, "I am the greatest criminal mastermind the world has ever seen!"

"Yeah, and I'm the Queen of Sweden," said Solaris.

"You're one to talk," said Icy, "all you did was bring in one freak for the sacrifice."

"I made those power-enhancing items for you and your sisters!" said Solaris, "your welcome, by the way. And you, Lucas Vega, I haven't heard any thanks for perfecting Soma-99 from either you or your followers."

"Revolutionaries have no need of saying thank you," said Lucas as he took more of the drug.

"Do you have to get your fix right now?" Icy asked, "you degenerate."

"And another thing!" said Lucas, "you're one to talk. You kept bragging online about all the atrocities you and your sisters did back

in your home universe; all those fairies you tortured, mutilated and murdered. All the insinuations of true love you've destroyed. And let's not forget all those puppies you drowned when you were seven. And you call me a degenerate!"

"I never drowned any puppies!" said Icy, "I happen to like dogs! You're just making this up! I ought to... !" but she faltered and gasped in pain, her hands clutching at her heart.

"What? What is it?!" Lucas asked.

"A heart attack perhaps?" Olaf asked. "A myocardial infarction?"

"No, she senses something," said Solaris, "something that has chilled her already frozen heart."

"Darcy, she... she's... !" exclaimed Icy in a horrified tone, "I have to go!" with that she teleported out.

"Hey! Get back here!" Lucas shouted.

"She's gone, you dithering dumbbell!" said Olaf, "our dear friend of a witch has abandoned us."

"I guess that means she's decided to forfeit her share of Yog-Sothoth's blessing," said Solaris.

"All the more for the rest of us," said Olaf. He then went back to the pulpit and resumed flipping through the pages of The Necronomicon, "now, where is that spell?"

"Would you mind skimming faster?" Lucas asked irately, "we're wasting nighttime."

"Don't push me, boy!" exclaimed Olaf, "the last thing any of us needs is for me to make a mistake."

"Wouldn't that be a shame," said Solaris in a sincere tone.

"She's right," said Violet to Clair and Frankie, "if Olaf reads the wrong spell, we'd be dead just the same as if he read the right one, or worse."

"Damned either way," said Clair.

"Cleo, Sora, everyone," said Frankie, "please, hurry."

... The Tunnels...

The death of Darcy and Stormy's retreat caused the majority of the Monster Haters still standing to lose heart. Six had surrendered, while the rest still alive had run for it. Only Dalton and Orlando was still fighting, with Dalton having received the most wounds, but is still fighting the hardest.

"He's been stabbed twenty times and shot seven!" shouted Julia as she reloaded her pistols, "why won't he go down!" She then shot at Dalton again, hitting him in the shoulder, adding to the three bullet wounds in his upper torso, one in his left arm and two in his right leg, while sporadically spaced across his body were a score of stab wounds and countless minor cuts. Yet all his wounds were in various states of healing.

"His metabolism is still hyped up on the drug!" shouted Aaron as he treated Felicia for broken bones in her arm and legs, while a bandaged Deuce, Clawdeen and Heath sat nearby, "it's like PCP for him!"

"We've got to do something," said Sora as he, Riku, Steven, Howleen and Abbey fought Dalton, none of them wanting to get too close to the manic.

"You fools!" shouted Dalton as he dosed up again, "you cannot defeat me! I am invincible!"

"Keep shouting that, you bastard!" said Mark as he guarded the Monster Haters who gave up, the six prisoners sitting with their hands zip tied behind their backs.

"This guy must have a really rare metabolic rate to keep going this long on the drug," said Aaron as he finished setting Felicia's bones, then checked Deuce, "you won't be playing any extreme sports any time soon, my serpentine friend."

"Oh, dude," said a depressed Deuce, "that sucks," even his hair snakes looked down an out, hissing with sadness.

"Oh, my poor darling Deuce," said Cleo in a comforting tone as she sat nearby, while Draculaura also sat nearby with frog-Clawd in her arms, "if only I had remembered to pack a healing amulet."

"You still need to figure out how to fix Clawd!" said Draculaura, "I can't have a frog for a boyfriend!" at that frog-Clawd croaked in agreement.

"I'm trying," said Cleo as she looked at the frog amulet.

"Maybe you should have read the instructions on those things," said Laura.

"Don't you start with me, Laura Hurst!" snapped Cleo as she angrily gripped the frog amulet, "I've been through too much tonight to," she then pressed a hidden switch on the frog amulet and it shot a beam of blue magic at frog-Clawd. In a flash, he resumed his werewolf form, still in Draculaura's arms, causing her to lose balance and fall to the ground.

"Hey, I'm alright!" said Clawd, "and D, you turned into a bat!"

"I'm so happy, Clawd," said Draculaura, "but would you mind getting off of me!?"

"Huh? Oh, sorry," said Clawd. He then got up and then helped Draculaura stand up.

"I suppose I should read the instructions on these items," said Cleo, "but it will have to wait. Now," she then rummaged through her purse again, "where is it? Ah-ha!" she then pulled out a jade scorpion studded with rubies, diamonds and an onyx stinger. The scorpion was roughly the size of a walnut, able to fit inside Cleo's palm with plenty of room to spare.

"What is that supposed to do?" Deuce asked.

"You're about to find out," said Cleo. She then twisted the claws on the scorpion 90 degrees up. The jade scorpion then began moving, waving its tail back and forth and snapping its claws. It then walked around Cleo's palm before stopping in the middle, then with a shimmer of magic, merged into her hand, becoming a tattoo-like mark on her palm.

"There," said Cleo, "I now have one hour to touch that drug user and pass the curse onto him."

"Curse?!" Deuce asked frantically, "you put the curse on yourself!?"

"That's how the curse works," said Cleo, "I didn't make the rules of Ancient Egyptian magic. But I'll be fine, Deuce," she then gave her boyfriend a loving kiss, "when I touch Dalton, the scorpion will enter his body, crawl onto his heart and sting him. He'll be as dead as The Dead Sea within seconds."

Just then they all saw Dalton falter in his attack on Abbey, becoming ridged and collapsing to the floor, convulsing violently.

"Dr. Spartan!" shouted Lilith.

Aaron ran over just as Dalton stopped twitching. He checked for a pulse and found none, "he's dead," Aaron said as he sat back, "he had so much Soma-99 in his system, it drove his heart and blood

pressure into overdrive. It's a wonder he didn't blow a blood vessel sooner."

"A blown blood vessel?" Heath asked, "you mean he really popped a gasket?"

"In the brain actually," said Aaron, "yes. I'll have to do an autopsy to be sure, but I believe he suffered from an aneurysm in one of his cranial arteries, probably an already weakened blood vessel. The increased blood pressure and pulse rate broke the vessel, leading to intracranial bleeding, leading to increased intracranial pressure that triggered a seizure and ultimately brain death. He most likely died without feeling a thing."

"He didn't deserve a painless death!" said Clawdeen irately, while Deuce and everyone else wounded by Dalton nodded in agreement.

"Just hold on," said Kairi as she walked over to Clawdeen, "I'll have everyone fixed up in a jiffy." She then began healing Clawdeen.

"Well, we didn't do too badly," said Jill as she wiped blood off of her saber and sheathed it.

"We didn't lose anyone down here," said Max, "we might just get out of this yet." He then activated his com link, "topside, this is rescue team. We have the situation under control and will soon be ready to proceed."

... Outside Belvedere Castle...

"Good work, Max," said Patricia as she stood in front of the computer system. Additional Bureau personnel had arrived in more tan vans and had taken over the computer system from Jackson and Tyler, whom were with Ghoulia, Chad and J.D. by the stairs, "casualty report?"

"At least a dozen confirmed dead enemies," said Max, "with six prisoners awaiting transport. One witch is down, while the second is missing but wounded. No sign of the third, nor of Lucas Vega or Olaf."

"Affirmative," said Patricia, "what of our casualties?"

"No fatalities," said Max, "just minor and moderate wounds that Aaron and Kairi are taking care off. We'll be fully ready to move on within five minutes."

Patricia then looked at Ghoulia, Chad, Jackson, Tyler and J.D. "Stay where you are, Max. I'm coming down there myself along with additional support to take care of the prisoners."

"Rodger, Patricia," said Max, "we'll be waiting for you."

"Over and out," said Patricia. She then walked over to Chad, Jackson, Tyler and J.D., "gentlemen, shall we?"

"After you, good lady," said Chad as he, Ghoulia, Jackson, Tyler and J.D. stood to the side of the stairs.

"Why, thank you," said Patricia as she smiled, "it's nice to see proper manners in today's youth." With that Patricia limped down the stairs, followed by the four boys.

... The Tunnels...

"What's Patricia thinking!" exclaimed Laura, "coming down where while we're still on the job! She can't fight with her ankle still busted!"

"What happened to her ankle?" Kairi asked.

"Never mind her ankle!" exclaimed Cleo as she held up her hand, showing everyone the mark of the jade scorpion, "what am I to do

about this! I have less than an hour to touch someone and pass the curse onto them, otherwise, the curse will kill me!"

"Then why did you use that item in the first place!?" exclaimed Malcolm, "my gods, woman! You're messing with mystic forces beyond your understanding! It's a miracle you haven't killed yourself before this! Or worse, killed your friends!"

"Hey, she's freaked out enough as it is!" said an irate Deuce, while his hair snakes hissed angrily at Malcolm.

"You'll have to excuse... Mitch," said Riku, eyeing Kairi, "he's got issues with people who abuse magic."

"Guess this means you won't be using any magic items any time soon, huh?" Toralei asked.

At that Cleo looked at Toralei, "hey, come here a second, will you?" she then held out the scorpion-marked hand.

At that Toralei backed away, "uh-uh! No thank you!" she said, "you're not putting the curse on me!"

"Well, I've got to put it on someone!" said Cleo.

Just then Icy teleported into the room and unleashed a dark spell that blasted everyone with strength-sapping snow, causing nearly everyone in the room to collapse to the ground.

"Hey, Cleo," said a woozy Heath as Icy rushed past him, "put the curse on her!"

"I would if I could move!" said Cleo.

Icy then stopped at Darcy's body, kneeling down to cradle her younger sister, tears falling from her eyes, "Darcy! No! No!" She then wailed with heartache.

"I don't believe it," said Malcolm as he managed to sit up, "a dark witch of your malicious malice, crying over a loved one."

"Looks like you've got a heart after all," said Tess.

At that Icy blasted everyone with more strength-sapping snow, knocking Malcolm and Tess back down.

Icy then stood up, her eyes burning with cold fury, "who did this? Which one of you pieces of filth killed my sister!? And where's Stormy?"

"Stormy?" Tara asked as she struggled to her feet, "that weather maniac with really bad hair? She took off like a bat out of hell after her item blew up."

"And I shot Darcy after her item blew up," said Julia as she stood up and struggled to aim her double barrel riffle at Icy.

"Thank you for telling me," said Icy in a neutral tone. She then formed a huge block of ice and hovered it above Julia, "now die!" she then dropped the ice block.

But then a beam of ice energy blasted the block away from Julia.

"Hey, frosty boobs!" said Abbey as she walked towards Icy, "you should not be hurting my friends!"

"Why are you still standing?" Icy asked.

"Abbey's from the Himalayas," said Lagoona, "she's used to the cold."

"We'll see about that," said Icy as she walked towards Abbey, "no one is colder than I am!"

"You want ice on ice battle?" Abbey asked, "you got it!"

"Fine by me," said Icy as the two of them stopped within arms reach of each other, "we'll see who shatters first!" the two of them grasped hands and unleashed their powers, creating an area of subzero temperature around them that froze the ground and ceiling. They then increased their energies, freezing more of the tunnel and plunging the temperature even further down.

"They'll turn Central Park into a glacier at this rate!" said Katina as everyone backed away from the frozen battle.

"All those trees and animals living in the park," said Venus, "we've got to stop them!"

"I don't think we can even if we tried," said Laura.

"But Abbey can!" said Heath, "my girl's gonna flash freeze that alien witch! You can do it! Abbey! I believe in you!"

"But is she winning?" Kairi asked.

"Depends," said Lilith in a thoughtful manner, "Both are masters of the cold. Abbey has superior physical strength and endurance from her rugged upbringing. But that necklace," she looked at Icy's power enhancing item around her neck, "who knows what limits that has?"

As if in answer, Icy's necklace flashed dark blue and her power output doubled, nearly overwhelming Abbey. She held firm and unleashed more of her power, but Icy kept pouring on more and more cold.

It soon proved too much for Abbey as she cried out in pain and fell to her knees.

"Pathetic!" said Icy as she released Abbey, then kicked her down. "It's clear that I am without equal, rather disappointing actually."

"HEY!" Patricia shouted as she, Ghoulia, Chad, Jackson, Tyler and J.D., stood at the entrance of the area. Patricia then inhaled deeply,

her chest expanding far beyond any normal human should be able to do so.

"Cover your ears, everyone!" shouted Max. With that Sora, Cleo and everyone else put their hands on their ears.

Patricia then unleashed a massive, earsplitting scream that shook the whole tunnel system, almost like an earthquake, with the main force of the scream hitting Icy like a freight train and knocking her against the tunnel wall, cracking her necklace.

Patricia then stopped screaming, her lungs depleted of oxygen. She then inhaled with a gasp of relief, "wow!" she said in a slightly raspy tone after taking a few breaths, "I haven't let out one of those in years. I'm really out of shape."

"I told you that being parked in front of a desk would be your undoing," said Aaron, "you should have let me fix your ankle."

"Just let me get my second wind," said Kairi as she sat up, along with everyone else as the strength-sapping snow wore off, "I might be able to put your ankle to right, Patricia."

"Oh, that's not necessary," said Patricia modestly. She would have said more, but then Icy got back up, glaring hatefully at everyone. The frosty witch had several small cuts and bruises all over and had dislocated her left shoulder, but she still looked ready to keep fighting.

"That does it!" shouted Icy, "I've had enough of you all! I'm gonna freeze this whole damn planet solid, just like Domino!"

"You can't do that!" shouted Venus, "you'll kill all the plants!"

"And animals," said Howleen.

"And us Monsters, Meta Humans and Normies," said Jackson.

"You have to stop this, Icy," said Lilith, "you're crazy to use magic in your condition."

"Surrender while you can, Icy," said Max, "we'll see that you get a fair trial."

"Back in The Magical Dimension, I've got a death sentence on me!" Icy shouted, "I murdered Stella, Princess of Solaira. It broke Bloom's poor heart, Brandon's too. But it was worth it just to see that little light pixy die."

"No, I don't believe it," said Tess in a stunned tone, "you..."

"This isn't the same Winx that we know," said Riku, "but I agree," he looked at Icy, "you're pure evil."

"If anyone deserves to be called a monster negatively, it's you!" said Gill.

"Whatever!" said Icy as she raised her good arm and began channeling magic, while her necklace began to emit blue sparks, "I hope you all packed long underwear! It's about to get chilly!"

"Don't do it!" shouted Katina, "in the name of God, stop!"

"Screw you!" shouted Icy as she channeled more magic. But then her necklace exploded. The freezing spell faded out as Icy fell to the ground, her neck burst open and her head flopping awkwardly to the side due to a broken neck.

"If she's not dead," said Clawdeen as she and everyone else got back up, "I'll groom Toralei's fur for a month."

"I wouldn't let you groom my fur with a ten-foot brush," said Toralei, "but thanks for the offer."

"Abbey!" shouted Heath as he rushed over to the yeti beauty. "Abbey, say something!" he cried as he cradled her in his arms, "anything!"

"Heath," Abbey whispered, "you is sitting on my foot."

"Huh? Oh, sorry," said Heath as he repositioned himself.

"Everyone else okay?" Tyler asked as he walked up to his brother.

"Just a little tired," said Aaron, "a few minutes rest to replenish stamina would be prudent."

"We may not have a few minutes," said Jackson, "they could be performing the ritual right now!"

At that Ghoulia moaned something as she held up a scanning device she had linked to her laptop.

"Ghoulia says she's not detecting any disruptions in the fabric of reality," said Clawd, "I take it that's a good thing, right?"

"It means that Olaf hasn't started to summon Yog-Sothoth yet," said Patricia, "but I can't imagine why he's delaying. He's had plenty of time to do it and the night is only getting older."

"The Necronomicon is a big book," said Laura, "he may not know the exact spell unless he sees it."

"Then we may have time yet," said Aaron, "but I wish we had more time for everyone to rest up."

"It's times like this that I truly miss Andrew," said Jill, "him and his energy cookies. One bite and you'll be fully restored."

"Our Andrew makes energy muffins," said Jana, while Hezekiah nodded in agreement.

"Is the other Andrew happy with my other self?" Jill asked.

"Very happy," said Tess, "he likes his alone time, but when he's with his Jill, there are times when they can't keep their hands off of each other."

"Good," said Jill, "they both deserve as much happiness as they can get."

... The Sacrificial Chamber... A Few Minutes ago...

"Patience may be a virtue, Count Olaf," said a thoroughly irritated Lucas, "but not with me! Find that damn spell already!"

"If I rush I might miss the spell and have to start reading the book all over!" said Olaf, "do you want to go to college and learn Sumerian? Well? Do you? We can always wait another Mayan Long Count to do this again!"

"I have no desire to wait another five thousand odd years," said Lucas, "proceed at your own pace," he then held up a fist, "but be warned. If we miss the deadline for the ritual, you shall be the first to taste my wrath."

"Lower your fist, dear Lucas," said Olaf, "I shall find the ritual, fear not." he then continued to flip through the pages of The Necronomicon.

"Just how big is that book, anyway?" Frankie asked.

"Over seven hundred pages," said Clair, "if we're lucky, the ritual Olaf's looking for is in the very back."

Just then Olaf shouted with triumph, "Ah ha! Found it!"

"About damn time!" shouted Lucas.

"Oh crap!" said Clair as she looked at the chains she had been filing through and saw that she still had more than half to go, while Frankie and Violet weren't that much further along. "Girls, I think we truly are in trouble!"

Just then The Pimpled Man and Hook-Handed Man wheeled in the cage containing Klaus and Sunny.

"It just got worse," said Frankie as she realized that Violet had frozen up at the sight of her captive brother and sister.

"Violet, you have to keep going!" said Clair in a hushed tone, "Klaus and Sunny are finished if you give up!"

At that Violet nodded and started filling again.

Just then Orlando limped into the chamber. He was bleeding from a dozen wounds and had a compound fracture of his left radius and his right eye had swollen shut. "Lucas!" he shouted as he limped over, "Lucas, we are defeated!"

"WHAT!?" Lucas roared as he ran over and grabbed Orlando, shaking him violently and aggravating his wounds, "what did you say!"

"We are defeated, Lucas," said Orlando, "Paulette and Dalton are dead! Most of the others have been slain, while the rest have either fled or surrendered. The Trix have also been vanquished, with Icy and Darcy dead and Stormy nowhere to be seen."

"So much for them," said Olaf nonchalantly.

Lucas then snapped Orlando's neck and glared at Olaf, "they were weak and had no place in the revolution!" he snapped, "all of those weak and tainted shall be swept aside in the new order!" he then looked at his three remaining followers, "you! Stay and observe the ritual! If Olaf even so much as thinks he can worm his way out of ensuring our end of the bargain, break him!"

"What are you going to do?" Solaris asked.

"I'm going to put an end to those blasphemers once and for all!" said Lucas as he administered another dose of Soma-99, "starting with

that traitorous bitch, Lilith von Hellscream!" With that he ran out of the room.

"Hmmm," said Olaf. He then went back to the pulpit and began reading the spell, "yes, yes, this is a very complicated ritual indeed. I shall need to study it first before the actual performance. An actor needs to know the script if he is to impress the audience."

"Take your time," said Solaris, "we wouldn't want you summoning Yig instead of Yog-Sothtoth, now would we?"

"Yes, that would be a horrific mistake," said Olaf.

Solaris then walked over to the altar and make it look like she was checking the chains. "I'm doing all I can to delay him," she whispered to Violet, "but with those last three junkie goons and Olaf's minions, there's not much more I can do to get Klaus and Sunny to safety."

"Please, try," said Violet.

"I will," said Solaris. She then spoke loudly for the baddies to hear, "enjoy your last moments of sanity. Very few whom become the playthings of Yog-Sothtoth emerge without madness, assuming they emerge alive."

She then whispered to Clair, "spit on me."

Clair nodded slightly, then spat on Solaris' face, "go to hell!"

"You'll be there sooner than I will," said Solaris. She then whispered, "perfect."

... The Tunnels...

"Okay, we're as ready as we can be," said Max after everyone had a chance to catch their breath, "let's finish this."

"I've still got the trail of Frankie, Clair and Violet," said Shawn, "straight ahead."

But then Lucas ran into the area, "None shall pass!" he shouted.

"Oh dang it!" said Heath.

"I forgot about him," said Deuce.

"None will pass," Lucas said again, "all of you shall die here and now!" he then pointed a finger at Lilith, "you shall be the first to fall by my hand, traitor!"

"You want me, Lucas?" Lilith asked, "fine by me! You've got no one to help you cheat anymore. And I've got my new power to match your drugs. This fight will be decided on skill alone!"

"What new power is this?" Lucas asked, "not that it matters. You may have cheated death once tonight, but you won't be so lucky again!"

"I didn't exactly cheat death," said Lilith, "it just wasn't my time. As for my new power," she then smiled at Max and the other Ramblers, "let's just say I've got a lot more in common with them than I do with you. And I mean that as a compliment to my friends and an insult to you."

"She's a Meta Human, Lucas Vega," said Jill, "and a thumping good one after she's trained up a bit."

"And I'd look pretty hot in one of those tan jackets, don't you think?" Lilith asked.

"Tan's not really your color," said Cleo.

"I suppose you're right," said Lilith.

"Oh, I'd love to design new jackets for The Bureau!" said Clawdeen. "you'd all look freaky fabulous and fierce at the same time."

"I'll think about it," said Patricia.

All this time, Lucas looked like he was ready to explode with fury. "You..." he said in a trembling tone to Lilith, "you're a... a mutant!?"

"It seems that way," said Lilith smugly, "mutant, and proud of it."

"Have you no shame!?" Lucas shouted, "your uncle... !"

"My uncle can go to hell!" shouted Lilith, "and so can you!" She then assumed a fighting stance, "now put up or shut up!"

"So be it," said Lucas grimly as he assumed a fighting stance, "I am going to enjoy breaking you beyond repair." He and Lilith began circling, maintaining eye contact as they waited for an opening.

The moment came and the two of them rushed in and met with an explosive fury of punches and kicks so fast they could barely be followed by human eyes.

"What's happening!?" Jackson asked as he hastily cleaned his glasses, "I can't tell who's winning!"

"I hope it's Lilith," said Chad as he looked at the fight with worried eyes.

After a few seconds the two fighters broke apart. Both had suffered numerous cuts, bruises and cracked bones. But then Lucas's wounds healed, as did Lilith's. On the other hand, Lucas was sweating more and breathing harder than Lilith was.

"End this now, Lucas!" said Lilith, her body recovering faster than his was, "surrender and you'll get a fair trial."

"I spit on human justice!" snapped Lucas. He then took more of the drug, accelerating his healing.

"And you can get proper medical treatment!" said Lilith, "have you seen yourself lately? You're a mess! You're going to kill yourself if

you keep taking the drug! Dalton already had a brain aneurysm, and a lot of the others not dead will be messed up for life. Stop this now before it's too late!"

"I don't take orders from traitors!" shouted Lucas as he took more of the drug and rushed at Lilith again. This time he was much faster and his strikes were delivering much more damage, inflicting more and more pain on Lilith that eventually knocked her down.

Lucas then knelt down and began strangling Lilith, "I'll make sure this time! I won't stop until you're truly dead! Die, Lilith von Hellscream! Die! Thus dies all traitors to the revolution!"

But then Max grabbed Lucas by his head and threw him across the room with enough force to send him crashing through the solid wall of the tunnel.

Max then helped Lilith get up, the bruises on her neck already fading, "one thing about Meta Humans," he said, "we always help each other out."

"Thanks," said Lilith, "does this mean I'm a Rambler yet?"

"You've still got to sign a tone of paper work," said Felicia.

"And then there's an oath and a small ceremony," said Julia.

"Not to mention the hazing," said an eagerly grinning Steven.

Just then Lucas got back up, his eyes wide and bloodshot with rage, "you mutant filth!" he shouted as he ripped off his shirt, "I'll send you all to hell!" he then injected his remaining five doses of Soma-99 into his body, then rushed at Lilith and Max, inflicting hundreds of punches and kicks within three seconds, knocking both Meta Humans to the ground.

"This is crazy!" shouted Clawd "I thought the drugs weren't supposed to work anymore!"

"I... I don't know why he's not adapting to it," said Aaron.

"Well, he's gonna tear us all apart at this rate," said Tess as she and everyone watched as Lucas beat Lilith and Max to a pulp. The two of them healed from their wounds, only to suffer more and more brutal injuries from the out of control maniac.

"There's got to be some way to slow that psychopath down!" said Laura.

"Shooting and stabbing won't work," said Julia, while Felicia shook her head.

"And ice won't even make lunatic blink," said Abbey.

"I doubt he'd even notice if I burned him," said Heath.

"Maybe we could poison him," said Jackson.

"With what?" Clawdeen asked.

Just then Ghoulia moaned something in an excited manner. She then pointed at Cleo.

"What? Is there blood on my clothes?" Cleo asked as she frantically looked herself over.

"Your outfit's fine," said Clawdeen. "Not that it matters right now, but...."

Ghoulia then moaned again and pointed at Cleo's right hand, specifically the jade scorpion tattoo on her palm.

"Of course!" said Lagoona, "Ghoulia, you're a genius!"

Ghoulia then modestly moaned something, then looked at Jackson, as if saying it was all his idea.

"Would someone please explain it to me?" Cleo asked.

"The curse tattoo!" said Riku, "of course!"

"All you need to do to activate it is touch someone and the scorpion crawls onto them, right?" Aiden asked.

"Well, yes," said Cleo, "but how does... oh, I get it now! I can pass it to Lucas! It's perfect."

"No, it ain't!" said Deuce, "if Cleo tries to get close to that maniac, he'll rip her apart!"

"Oh, yeah, that would be a problem," said Sora.

"Then, we'll just have to take the bastard by surprise," said Mark.
"Steven, time for a fastball special."

"I've got a better name for it," said an eagerly grinning Steven.
Without warning, he grabbed Cleo and held her over his head.

"Hey! What the... !" exclaimed Deuce.

"Unhand me!" exclaimed an outraged Cleo, "put me down this instant!"

"Cleo Missile!" shouted Steven. He then threw Cleo like a javelin at Lucas. Startled at first, Cleo then screamed in fright, but then focused with grim determination as she neared her target. She held her right hand out and collided with Lucas, her right hand touching his lower right shoulder, startling him away from crushing Max's head. Max and Lilith gasped in relief as their pounding stopped.

"What the hell!" shouted Lucas as he looked at Cleo, "Monster scum! How dare you touch me!" He then reared back to deliver a killing punch.

"Before you strike an Egyptian Princess," said Cleo as she got up, holding out her now bare right palm, "I'd check your epidermis."

Blinking in confusion, Lucas's eyes then widened in horror as he reached behind him, "what? What is this thing on my back!? What's crawling on me!?"

"There's nothing there, you junkie!" shouted Max as he and Lilith got back up, their wounds now almost healed.

"Except for that moving tattoo," said Lilith.

The jade scorpion tattoo had come alive and was skittering across Lucas' back, making its way to his left shoulder.

"What is this thing?!" Lucas exclaimed as he saw the scorpion tattoo crawl across his shoulder onto his chest. It stopped over his heart, raised and then plunged its stinger, the poisoned barb penetrating the skin and injecting its venom.

Lucas roared in agony as the venom coursed into his heart and throughout his bloodstream. He thrashed about, wildly throwing punches, before collapsing to the ground, exhausted.

"Hey, he's not dead," said Mark as he sheathed his sword, "I thought that curse was going to kill him."

"It should have," said Cleo as she rubbed her empty hand.

"I think we have a one in a million medical oddity on our hands," said Aaron, "I'll have to do a tone of tests, but maybe, just maybe, the magical venom of that scorpion countered the Soma-99 in his system, purging it and leaving him powerless."

"What!?" exclaimed Lucas, "no, that cannot be!" he then felt his pockets for more Soma-99 and found he was out, "NO! Impossible!"

"No more fixes for you, Lucas," said Lilith as she walked towards her former friend, "give up now!"

"I'll never give up!" shouted Lucas, "the revolution will never surrender! I will never surrender! I am the chosen one! Do you hear

me?!" he then rushed at Lilith with his fists raised, "I AM THE CHOSEN ONE!"

Lilith then delivered a right cross to Lucas's face, knocking him off his feet and leaving him on the ground unconscious.

"You chose poorly," said Lilith as she rubbed her hand.

At that moment, additional Bureau agents arrived to take care of the prisoners.

"Get this jackass out of here," said Patricia. The additional agents nodded and began collecting the prisoners.

"It's almost over," said Max, "let's get going."

... The Sacrificial Chamber...

"And now we begin!" said Olaf, "the stars are right for the arrival of Yog-Sothoth!"

"Olaf, you've got to stop this!" shouted Violet as she frantically filed at the chains, realizing that she was almost through, as was Clair and Frankie with their chains, "is your lust for power stronger than your self preservation?!"

"You summon that thing that should not be and we're all doomed!" shouted Clair.

"Don't do it!" Frankie shouted.

"Silence!" shouted Olaf, "none shall interrupt this ritual!"

Just then Sora, Max, Cleo and the others burst into the chamber. "Olaf!" shouted Patricia.

"You're too late!" Olaf shouted, "I've won!" he then held up The Necronomicon, "I have the power to sacrifice you all to Yog-Sothoth!"

"The hell you do!" shouted Tara. She then aimed her wand at the book, "*Accio Necronomicon!*" with that the book flew out of Olaf's hands and Tara caught it.

"Nice catch," said an impressed Sora.

"Thanks," said Tara, "almost makes me regret not trying out for Quidditch," she then handed The Necronomicon to Max, "I believe this belongs to you."

"I'll make sure it gets back to the museum," said Max as he took the book.

"NO!" shouted an outraged Olaf, "give me that!" He then gestured to the remaining Monster Haters, "kill them!"

"Don't bother," said Jill to the three Monster Haters, "there's no need to fight."

"Lucas has been defeated!" said Lilith, "your revolution is dead!"

"Surrender and you'll receive a fair trial," said Patricia, "you have my word. But if you keep fighting, well, I can't guarantee your survival."

"It's your choice," said Clawdeen as she and the other Monsters looked ready to keep going.

After two seconds, the last three Monster Haters slowly walked over with their hands raised. Mark, Felicia and Steven then restrained them with zip ties.

"I offer the same deal to you, Olaf," said Patricia, "give up now and you'll get your day in court."

"I spit on the law!" snapped Olaf. He then gestured to his theater troupe, "kill the orphans!"

"I think not," said Katina as she and Laura psy-blasted Olaf's followers, knocking them all out cold.

"You've lost, Olaf!" shouted Patricia as Jill rushed over to free Klaus and Sunny from the cage, then joined Shawn to help Violet, while Chad, Lilith and Jackson freed Clair, and Clawdeen, Lagoona and Cleo freed Frankie. At the same time, Julia, Felicia and Jana restrained Olaf with their blades and pistols.

"Who designed your dress, Frankie?" Cleo asked as Clawdeen broke the chains, then helped Frankie sit up, "it's hideous."

"I feel like last year's fashion," said Frankie, "tired and worn out."

"She needs a recharge fast!" said Clair as she was freed from her chains. She sat up, embraced and kissed Jackson, "I knew you'd come."

"I'd never abandon you," said Jackson. With that they kissed again.

"I kept my promise too," said Jill as she freed Violet from her chains, "I didn't get to kill The Trix, but they're finished regardless."

"I never doubted you'd come," said Violet. With that she and Jill hugged.

But then Violet saw Shawn. The two of them gazed at each other, lost in each others eyes.

"Is this what I think it is?" Lagoona asked.

"True love," said a smiling Kairi, "a very good friend of mine said that the sings of true love could be seen if you know what to look for."

"Uh... hi," said a nervous and slightly embarrassed Shawn, "I'm Shawn Ohmsford."

"Violet Baudelaire," said Violet hesitantly. She then stood up and faced Shawn, "call me crazy, but I feel like I know you, like I've always known you."

"I feel the same way," said Shawn. He then took out Violet's hair ribbon, "this lead me to you." He then handed the ribbon to Violet.

"What about Clair's bracelet!?" Jackson asked.

"And Frankie's phone," said Draculaura.

Shawn pulled out both items and threw them to their respective owners without breaking eye contact with Violet. Slowly but surely, Violet and Shawn moved closer, embraced and kissed.

"What'd I tell you?" a happily smiling Kairi, "true love."

"NO!" shouted Olaf, "NO! I WILL NOT BE DENIED!" with that he pushed his way free of Felicia, Julia and Jana, pulled out an obsidian dagger and ran at Violet, moving much faster than a normal human of his age and build should be able to run.

"DIE! VIOLET BAUDELAIRE!" Olaf shouted as he raised the knife.

But Shawn saw the attack coming and put himself between Violet and Olaf. The mad actor brought the knife down, plunging it into Shawn's heart.

It was a tense moment as everyone gazed in shock at the sight of the black dagger sticking out of Shawn. Even Olaf was startled by this sudden turn of events.

"You will never hurt Violet again!" Shawn shouted. He then raised his hands to psy-blast Olaf, but then collapsed to the floor and didn't move.

Violet looked down in numb disbelief, "Shawn? Shawn!?" she fell to her knees and began shaking him, "Shawn! Wake up!"

"Aaron!" Jill exclaimed. Aaron ran over and felt Shawn for a pulse, then checked his breathing.

He then looked up with grim finality, "he's dead."

"What? No," said Jill in an unbelieving tone, "no, he can't be dead."

"He is dead," said Aaron, "the dagger severed his aorta. I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do."

"How sad," said Olaf, "little Violet, having survived so much misery, to finally emerge triumphant over her mortal enemy and finding true love, only to have that love taken away. Shakespeare couldn't have done better."

At those words, Violet heard the female voice whom had been tempting her, *'He's killed your one true love! He's killed your soul mate! He must pay! Kill him!'*

Violet looked up, her eyes on fire with unadulterated hate and rage, "damn you, Olaf!" she exclaimed, "damn you to hell!" she then rushed over to Max and grabbed his revolver out of its holster, "Damn you to hell!"

"Time to go!" Olaf exclaimed. He then began running for the chamber entrance.

Violet then took aim and pulled the trigger, the recoil of the shot knocking her down. The bullet shot across the chamber and missed Olaf by millimeters, hitting the ground to the left of the fleeing villain, but the air displacement of the bullet was so powerful, it tore his left foot and ankle apart. Olaf fell down, shouting in agony and clutching at his mangled lower limb.

"Well, that was lucky," said Malcolm.

"I was aiming for his black heart," said Violet as she walked towards the crippled Olaf. "I won't miss again."

"So," said Olaf as he gritted his teeth against the pain, "you finally, truly have gotten the best of me, Violet."

"Shut up!" shouted Violet as she aimed the revolver at Olaf's heart, "you don't have any right to speak to me! I'm going to silence you once and for all!"

"That's not necessary!" said Patricia as she and the others rushed over, "he's not going anywhere."

"He'll be brought to trial and sentenced," said Jill, "it's over, Violet."

"You've done enough," said Max as he walked up to Violet, "now, give me back my gun."

But before he could touch her, Max was thrown back from Violet, an orange barrier flashing around her and Olaf.

"What the hell now!?" exclaimed Jill as she, Katina and Aaron helped Max get back up, "What was that?"

"A force field?" Patricia asked. She then limped up to the barrier and tapped it with her cane, the end of the stick catching on fire.

"We can't get to her," said Clawd.

"And we can't stop her from killing Olaf," said Kairi.

"We can try," said Frankie, "Violet, you've got to calm down!"

"Killing Olaf won't bring Shawn back," said Clair.

"It'll make me feel better," said Violet.

She then heard the voice again, *'Yes, it will make you feel better. It will take away the agony in your heart. He must pay for his crimes. Kill him.'*

"He must pay for his crimes!" Violet shouted, "he must die!"

' Yes, ' said the voice, 'he must die.'

Sora then saw something strange and disturbing. Right next to Violet was a small field of shimmering gray fog. Acting on instinct, Sora summoned his Keyblade, pointed at the shimmering field, "Deep Freeze!"

The Blizzaga spell hit the gray field and caused it to shatter, revealing a tall woman with long black hair styled into a bun, wearing a black and gray petticoat dress with a black and gray cloak, black and gray jewelry, black makeup and nail polish and wearing a black mask over her eyes.

"So, you found me out, Sora," said the woman, speaking in an Italian accent, her voice dripping with hate, "I had hoped that we would meet under more favorable conditions, but now is as good a time as any."

"Who are you?" Sora asked.

"And why have you been manipulating Violet?" Clair asked.

"She's the one who's been manipulating Violet?" Frankie asked.

"Violet's been manipulated?!" Jill exclaimed.

"We've all been manipulated!" Klaus shouted, "that horrible woman, she set this whole thing up!"

"Guilty as charged," said the woman as she gave a mock bow.

"You still haven't answered my question," said Sora, "who are you?"

"Oh, of course," said the woman, "allow me to introduce myself. I am Columbina, and I am going to destroy you, Sora, you and everyone you love."

The end of chapter 9.

Next chapter finds our heroes and allies doing everything they can from preventing Violet from making a terrible choice. And just who or

*what is Columbina? Reviews will be rewarded with cake and pie.
See you then!*

The Real Mastermind

Last time found Violet placed in an impossible situation; Olaf had Klaus and Sunny kidnapped and threatened to kill them unless she surrendered The Necronomicon. Once again, Violet was tempted to read the book to save herself and her loved ones, but at a cost. Rather than risk unleashing something unholy, Violet cast the book away in exchange for the freedom of Klaus and Sunny. But Olaf laughed at Violet's pleas for mercy and decided to make Klaus and Sunny watch the sacrifice to Yog-Sothoth. At that Violet snapped and vowed to kill Olaf. Olaf shrugged the threat off and searched through The Necronomicon for the summoning ritual, while Solaris helped Violet, Clair and Frankie cut their bonds so they would be ready to escape.

But then Sora and the rest of the rescuers infiltrated the tunnels to the sacrificial chamber, battling their way through The Trix and the Monster Haters. Many of Lucas' followers were slain, others surrendered and a handful escaped. Stormy was wounded and retreated, while both Darcy and Icy were killed and Lucas was rendered powerless and captured.

Our heroes and allies reached the chamber in time to stop Olaf from starting the ritual and The Necronomicon was recovered.

After Clair, Violet and Frankie were released from their chains, Violet and Shawn saw each other for the first time and instantly fell in love. But then Olaf ran at Violet with a knife. Shawn intercepted the knife and died, causing Violet to grab Max's revolver and shoot Olaf, crippling him. Violet then said she was going to kill Olaf. Our heroes tried to stop her but an energy barrier prevented them from reaching Violet and that was just the beginning. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Chapter 10: The Real Mastermind

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"You still haven't answered my question," said Sora, "who are you?"

"Oh, of course," said the woman, "allow me to introduce myself. I am Columbina, and I am going to destroy you, Sora, you and everyone you love."

"I beg your pardon?" Patricia asked.

"You all heard me," said the woman, Columbina, "I'm here to destroy Sora and everyone he loves," she then smiled wickedly, "and I'll start

by destroying Violet Baudelaire."

"The hell you will!" shouted Jill as she drew her saber and rushed at Columbina.

"No! Don't!" shouted Klaus, but his warning came too late. Jill plunged right through Columbina as if the woman was made out of air. Jill overbalanced and fell to the ground, at which Columbina laughed cruelly.

"She's a hologram or something," said Klaus.

"Or some kind of astral projection," said Jill as she stood up.

"This form you see is indeed an astral projection," said Columbina, "my real body is far beyond your reach, so there is nothing any of you can do to impede my purpose," she then looked at Violet, "destroying her, or rather, destroying her goodness, her inner light, her pure heart."

"Explain yourself!" Patricia demanded.

"It'd be my pleasure, Patricia Walker," said Columbina, "you see, I hate goodness, light and pure hearts, especially those pure hearts that reside in Princesses of Heart." She then looked at Sora, "that's right, I hate your friends in The Realms of Light; Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora and so on. I also hate those in other realms; Renesmee Cullen, Sara Lancaster, Tsukino Usagi and so on. I would try corrupting them, but their powers have fully awakened, shielding their hearts from my corrupting influence.

"But a new crisis approaches, a new cycle begins, a new set of Princesses of Heart is being chosen. Already, one of them have had her powers awakened and is beyond my influence. But there's six who are still asleep, so to speak, and Violet Baudelaire is one of them."

"What?!" exclaimed Aiden, "why? How? How is that possible!? I..."

"You wouldn't know because you've already completed your quest handed to you by the powers that be, Aiden Mackenzie, Keyblade Alchemist," said Columbina, "you found your seven princesses," she then looked at Malcolm, "the task has landed on your shoulders. The powers that be have chosen you to find the new generation of Princesses of Heart."

"Me?" Malcolm asked in a confused tone, "I never received such a quest."

"That's because you don't remember!" said Columbina as she smiled with vile glee, "the faces of the new princesses were given to you and you forgot all about it!"

"That's... reasonable," said an outraged and understanding Malcolm, "I knew my blackouts would come back to bite me in the ass."

"Yes, your disability has hindered you and assisted me all too well," said Columbina, "for all you know, you've encountered one or more of them already without ever you knowing it, and you never will."

"Lurden crap!" snapped Tess, "if Malcolm's got the identities of the new Princesses of Heart in his head, we'll help him remember!"

"He'll remember too late," said Columbina.

"Not if we work together!" said Sora, "and you're crazy! You can't corrupt a Princess of Heart. You can turn one evil."

"I can if I make them commit an act so dark, so evil, it cracks their pure heart," said Columbina, "it is in that crack that darkness shall pour in and corrupt that heart, changing it from pure light to pure darkness. The poor girl with a cracked heart shall become a Princess of Dark!"

"You're insane!" shouted Kairi, "you'll never corrupt a Princess of Heart!"

"I can and I will," said Columbina, "I already have, almost. You see, I arranged this whole fiasco you've all had to endure."

"She's been behind the whole thing!" said Klaus, while Sunny burred something in agreement.

"Indeed," said Columbina, "I revealed myself to young Klaus and Sunny while they were in captivity. It pleased me to let them know of their sister's destiny. Their anguish over being unable to save Violet was also pleasing. But I digress.

"Yes, I set this whole evening up. I arranged for The Necronomicon to be displayed at the museum on this night, the night of The Winter Solstice at the end of the Mayan Long Count cycle. It was all too easy to get Ramses de Nile to lobby for its preservation, then agree on it being in the museum for safe keeping, and to trust its security to The Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense. Everything fell into place exactly as I planned."

"So, Nefera had nothing to do with this?" Cleo asked. "She wasn't involved with Olaf and the others?"

"Oh, I had use for your idiot of a sister," said Columbina, "she was the one who convinced your father to let you go to the gala in their place. I had to separate you from Frankie and the others, just as I needed to separate Clair."

"What are you getting at?" Clair asked, "I'm not a Princess of Heart."

"Me neither," said Frankie.

"You could have been," said Columbina in a sinister tone, "both of you. This world had three candidates for the mantle of Princess of Heart; Clair Childs, Frankie Stein and Violet Baudelaire.

"Clair is too much of a misanthropic to have her heart completely pure, while Frankie's heart, an abomination such as it is, will always

have a spark of darkness in it, a legacy of her father's early misadventures.

"But Violet, now she is the perfect candidate. Despite all her trials and tribulations, despite losing her parents, suffering the incompetence of those responsible for her well being, despite the torments of Olaf, she never succumb to evil, never committed an unforgivable sin."

"Now I get it," said an irate Frankie, "you've been trying to get Violet to read The Necronomicon."

"But Violet doesn't know Sumerian," said Klaus.

"That's right," said Clair, "why didn't I realize it before. Even if she had opened the book, she couldn't have used it."

"My power would have allowed her to understand the writing," said Columbina, "had she succumbed to my influence and used The Necronomicon to destroy her enemies, it would have cracked her heart and she would have been a Princess of Dark within days."

"Not to mention killing a whole lot of innocent people!" said Laura.

"A necessary expenditure," said Columbina, "the more innocent blood spilt, the greater and quicker the corruption. And before you expel more of your energies, Laura Hurst, your power cannot find my true form, nor can yours, Katina Jones."

"It was worth a try," said Laura.

"At least I figured you're not on this world," said Katina.

"Again, you'll never locate me," said Columbina, "to continue, had Violet's own sense of logic not aided her heart, she would have been mine. But she retained her inner light and surrendered The Necronomicon. My initial plan failed, but I always have a contingency in place."

"Olaf," aid Riku.

"And Shawn," said Mark.

"I knew that Violet and Shawn were destined soul mates from the moment they were born," said Columbina, "and no, I will not reveal my information sources. Moving on, it was all too easy to manipulate Olaf into attacking Violet. He was so consumed by hate and frustration, all he needed was a little mental push to want to kill her.

"I knew that, having found his soul mate, Shawn would place himself between Violet and the knife." She then smiled wickedly, "yet he knew not that his sacrifice, his act of love, would lead to his soul mate's undoing. Violet's pure heart is cracking. Once she kills Olaf in cold blood, once she commit's the unforgivable sin of murder, her heart will succumb to the darkness and the first Princess of Dark shall be born!"

"She hasn't killed him yet!" shouted Jill. She then rushed to Violet, "don't do it, Violet!" but she was stopped by the same orange barrier that Max encountered.

"Nothing shall interfere with this," said Columbina, "that barrier will remain in place until Violet kills Olaf, or she decides not too. But the outcome is already determined."

"I won't accept that!" shouted Katina. She then sent a psy-blast at the barrier but it was negated.

"How much longer are you going to persist?" Columbina asked, "accept it; you've lost!" She then looked at Violet, whom was still aiming the revolver at Olaf, "you have the means to avenge Shawn. Take it! Kill Olaf!"

"No, don't kill him!" Jill shouted, "Violet, don't let this bitch manipulate you!"

"Save your breath," said Columbina, "Violet won't listen to you. Only my voice shall reach her ears."

"But she can still hear the rest of us," said Sora, "Violet! You've got to stop this!"

"Just let go of the gun!" said Tess, "killing Olaf won't make you feel better."

"It'll take away the pain," said Columbina to Violet, "it will make the hurting stop, forever."

"Leave her alone, you horrible Normie!" Frankie shouted, "are you even human?"

"Are you even humanoid?" J.D. asked, "are you a demon? Or something else?"

"I am a very complicated individual," said Columbina, "what I truly look like is of no importance."

"That's no answer!" Sora shouted, "who are you? What are you?"

"I am she who hates all those who foolishly defend the light," said Columbina, "I hate Keyblade Wielders, Princesses of Heart and all manner of heroes alike. And before you ask, I am not affiliated with Maleficent, Xehanort or any of their ilk. I act alone and alone I shall destroy you, Sora. But first, I shall help Violet along in her destiny."

She then looked at Violet, "Olaf is the embodiment of everything that has gone wrong with your life. He murdered your parents, burned down your home and all your possessions, left you and your siblings in the care of incompetent, moronic, self-absorbed men and women who never truly loved you. He has tormented you to steal your inheritance, he intended to sacrifice you to Yog-Sothoth! He was going to make your brother and sister watch! And now he has taken away your one true love. How can you tolerate his existence any longer?"

"Why isn't Olaf trying to get away?" Clawd asked, "yeah, he's got a busted leg, but he can still *try* to escape."

"He's trapped in the barrier," said Laura.

"I am holding him there with my influence," said Columbina, "he has been my pawn for some time now. If I wished, I could make him walk, or rather crawl now, into a den of lions and let himself be devoured."

"So now you've lead him to the slaughter like a pig!" said an outraged Patricia, "how dare you!"

"As if you care for a specimen like Olaf," said Columbina.

"He is still human," said Patricia, "with the right to due process."

"Don't try to debate justice with me, Patricia Walker," said Columbina, "you and everyone else here knows that Olaf would manipulate the legal system and escape. You all want him to die."

"You know nothing about us!" shouted Felicia.

"I know you all better than you think," said Columbina, "I know that you, Felicia Valentine, secretly desires to be with your comrade, Julia Eckhart, but you know it can never be, for she has secret thoughts for Steven Austin."

"What?!" exclaimed both Steven and Julia.

"Have you been spying on us?" Mark demanded.

"Are you a Scanner?" Katina asked.

"I am complicated," said Columbina, "enough of this foolish prater!" She then looked at Violet, "why hesitate? He is helpless before you! Do it! Kill him!"

Sora could tell that Violet was on the verge of succumbing to Columbina's influence and murder Olaf. But he also could tell that Violet's heart was holding her back, that her inner goodness was at war with her desire for revenge, her hate of Olaf. Her goodness was slowly losing the battle, but only a little was needed to tip the balance in favor of light, and that tip came from Jill.

"Violet," said Jill as she reached into her pocket and pulled out the letter from her other self, "before you decide anything, I want you to hear this."

"Foolish mutant!" snapped Columbina, "Violet is beyond your reach!" she glared at Violet, "do it! Pull the trigger!"

But Violet didn't pull the trigger. She glanced at Jill, her eyes betraying her uncertainty, "what... what is that?"

"A message from another world," said Jill, "from my alternate self. She wrote me a letter that not too long ago helped me shrug off a great weight in my heart, and perhaps it can do the same for you."

"Ignore her, Violet!" shouted Columbina, "nothing she says has any importance to you. All that matters is that you enact your vengeance on Olaf!"

"She hasn't killed him yet, you horrible creature!" said Jill defiantly as she unfolded the letter, "Violet may not listen to this, but she will hear it." She then began reading the letter.

Dear Jill,

Right now, you are still grieving for Andrew. I can only imagine the agony in your heart, the sheer rage and sorrow burning within. Even years after you lost your true love, even after adopting Violet and her siblings, accepting new love into your life, you're still in pain.

I know you still crave vengeance on the ones who took Andrew away from you, despite the fact that they're already dead. I know that if

you had your way, you'd bring them back to life so you can kill them, then resurrect them again and again just so you can have satisfaction.

However, murder and vengeance is not the answer, never the answer. I know that Andrew wouldn't want you wasting yourself on a senseless vendetta. He wouldn't want you surrendering to the darkness.

What he would want is for you to move on, to mend your broken heart. I'm not saying you should abandon your grief immediately, but let it go little by little, learn to live again and to find new love. You have so many wonderful friends whom already love you and they'll tell you the same thing.

In time you will move on from your loss, just as you will find someone else who will truly love you. I'm not saying you should forget Andrew, but you shouldn't dwell on his death. Remember him as he was alive. Remember the good, remember the love. So long as you keep his love in your heart, he will never truly be gone."

Jill looked up from the letter, "the rest isn't important, but I'll tell you the end. *'Just remember to keep the light going in your heart, keep the love alive.'*

"And it's signed *'a friend closer than you think,'* " said Jill. She then pocketed the letter and looked at Violet, "the same thing applies to you, Violet. Shawn wouldn't want you to murder Olaf!"

"How do you know that?" Columbina asked viciously, "how do you know Shawn wouldn't want his death avenged?"

"I know he wouldn't!" said Laura defiantly, "Shawn wasn't the kind of man who would obsess over revenge!"

"He'd want Violet to grieve and then move on," said Kairi. "Yes, I know your heart feels like it's been broken beyond repair, Violet, that you'll never find true love again. Well, that's crap! Yes, true love

is rare, but it's only a one-time thing if you think that way. If you believe that you'll never fall in love again, then you never will."

"You'll wind up a cranky old spinster," said Aiden, "with a dozen or so cats crawling all over your house."

"I sincerely doubt that Shawn would want you to end up as a crazy cat lady," said Clair.

"But... but Olaf!" said Violet, "he's done so much more evil!"

"And he will be held accountable for his crimes," said Max.

"Now that we know that he has a Meta Human ability," said Aaron, "we can counter it."

"What nonsense is this?" Olaf asked.

"So, you can hear us," said Patricia in a vindictive tone. She then looked at Columbina, "looks like your power of control isn't as strong as you think."

"I never said I was perfect," said Columbina, "but I am superior."

"Will you insufferable ingrates tell me what you are implying?" Olaf asked, "what is this ability you speak of?"

"Oh please, like you didn't know," said Clawdeen.

"Did you honestly believe that you pulled the wool over so many eyes on just your acting?" Cleo asked.

"You're so bad an actor that not even Ed Wood would have you in his films," said Steven.

"Are you kidding?" Chad asked, "I liked 'Bride of the Monster' and 'Plan 9 from Outer Space.'"

"Seriously?" a surprised Lilith asked, "I kinda liked those movies too."

"Okay, bad example then," said Steven, "let's see, who's a bad director?"

"Uwe Boll?" Draculaura asked.

"Perfect!" said Steven.

"The point is that I wouldn't give Olaf a Golden Raspberry award for worst acting even if my life depended on it, he's so awful," said Chad.

"But he can cloud the minds of the unwary into believing him," said Katina, "especially people whom are completely immersed in their studies."

"Like Uncle Monty," said Klaus, "and Aunt Josephine, she suffered from so many phobias, it's a miracle she ever got out of bed."

"Olaf's ability works on those suffering from mental and psychological disorders," said Aaron, "on people consumed by fear, obsessed with their own self-importance, greed and desires."

"But he can't fool us," said Max, "nor will he ever fool anyone again!"

"The Bureau has a synthetic chemical that can block Meta Human abilities," said Aaron, "we normally use it for Meta's whom wish to give up their powers and live normal lives. It's also used on Meta's who abuse their powers for evil, and Olaf has abused his worse than anyone else."

"He'll be rendered powerless, brought to trial and convicted for his crimes," said Jill, "and if the court wills it that he should be put to death, then he will."

"Give him the chair!" shouted Felicia.

"The gas chamber!" shouted Mark.

"Lethal injection!" shouted Julia.

"I hear some places still allow hanging," said Steven.

"The point is that he will pay for his crimes, Violet," said Max, "he will pay, but if you kill him, you'll be denying justice to all those people he hurt, to all those lives he ruined. You'll be satisfied, but what about his victims? Don't they deserve justice?"

"Shawn would want justice in the right way," said Jill, "as would your mother and father."

At that Columbina laughed viciously, "how pathetic; trying to reason when her mind is already made up." She then glared at Violet, "do it!"

But Violet's eyes betrayed her growing doubt. Her hands were trembling, disrupting her aim on Olaf.

"Do It!" Columbina shouted, "kill Olaf and embrace the darkness! Embrace your destiny as a Princess of Dark!"

"Oh my ghou!" said Draculaura, "she's going to do it!"

"No, she's still trying to decide!" said Frankie, "Violet, do what you think is right!"

The gears in Violet's mind were turning so fast that if they were a real machine, they'd shake apart. She weighed both choices, to kill or not to kill. To take satisfaction and everything that went with it or to deny that satisfaction and let fate take its course; to avenge Shawn or not; to give in to the darkness or walk in the light.

"DO IT!" shouted Columbina.

Her hands shaking so violently, Violet barely managed to keep hold on the revolver. Finally, with a cry of anguish, she threw the gun to

the floor.

Almost instantly, the barrier around Violet vanished. Jill rushed forward and caught a collapsing Violet. She buried herself in Jill's shoulder and bawled out all her hate, rage and sorrow.

"It's alright, Violet," said Jill as she embraced her, "just let it out. It's going to be alright."

"How pitiful," said Columbina as she crossed her arms contemptuously. "You disappoint me, Violet Baudelaire."

"Why are you still here?" Katina asked, "you've lost, so get lost already!"

"I feel like having a hanging anyway," Steven.

"You pick out a tree and I'll find some rope," said Felicia.

"Haven't I made it clear by now?" Columbina asked, "I'm not actually here. There is nothing you can do against me, so I will leave when I damn well please."

"So can we," said Jill, "come one, everyone, let's go home."

"I think not!" shouted Olaf. Everyone looked and saw that he had pushed himself into a sitting position and was aiming the revolver at Violet.

"You son of a bitch!" snapped Max, "give me that!"

"Come and take it!" shouted Olaf, "dear Violet will be stone dead by the time you get to me! I may be crippled, I may be facing certain doom, but I will not be denied a final act of wickedness!"

"*Expelliarmus* !" shouted Tara as she aimed her wand at Olaf. The revolver shot out of his hand and Max caught it in midair. He then held it by the barrel like it was covered in filth.

"Great, now I've got to spend hours cleaning his taint off of it," said Max in a disgusted tone.

"No more tricks, Olaf!" Katina said, "you're finished, plain and simple!"

"No, it's not over," said Solaris, "not yet." Before anyone could react, she pulled out a dart gun and shot a blue dart into Olaf's shoulder, "okay, now it's over."

"You traitorous wench!" snapped Olaf as he pulled the dart out, "what was that?"

"A taste of your own medicine," said Solaris, "remember back in The Gorgonian Grotto, when you pushed me into the *Medusoid Mycelium* ? I took a sizeable sample and preserved it in an airtight container before you betrayed me. Afterwards, while you were forcing me to prepare for tonight, I worked in secret, refining the *Medusoid* spores into an even more lethal poison. You don't have an hour to live, Olaf! You barely have five minutes if you're lucky, and no amount of horseradish will save your vile life!"

"You can't be serious," said Frankie in a disbelieving tone.

"I am serious," said Solaris grimly, "Olaf took everything from me that gave me hope. My dreams of perfecting the work of Frankenstein and Pretorius, reuniting Bertrand and Beatrice with their children, my own life, Olaf took it all away," she then glared down at Olaf, "and now, I've taken everything away from you. Columbina may have set this whole mess up, but I'm the one who truly brought it down!"

"You sabotaged me!" exclaimed Olaf whom was now sweating profusely.

"Yes!" exclaimed Solaris, a look of satisfied vindication on her face, "I engendered Soma-99 to fail Lucas and his cabal! I crafted flaws into the items for The Trix! I lead The Bureau right to your doorstep! And

now, I've destroyed you, Olaf! Warm enough for you? Well, it's about to get hotter."

By now Olaf was flushed all over and hyperventilating.

"I modified the *Medusoid* spores to increase your body temperature," said Solaris, "you won't suffer from organ failure as you reach 108°. No, I had something more fitting for you. The exact chemical process would take too long to explain, but the end result is quite simple; spontaneous combustion!"

All of a sudden, Olaf burst into flame. He flailed about on the ground, screaming in agony as the flames consumed him.

"Burn, god-damn you!" Solaris shouted, "you, who took out so many lights in the world! I now cast you into the fires of eternal darkness! Burn in darkness, you wicked bastard!"

Within seconds, the flames had reached enough intensity and heat to reduce Olaf to ashes.

"It's done," said Solaris in a relieved tone. She then looked at Patricia, "I'm sorry I had to do what I did, the trouble I had to put The Bureau through," she looked at Clair and Frankie, "and I am sorry that you and your friends got dragged into this."

"Just don't do it again," said Clair, "I'll forgive you this one time, but not the next."

"There won't be a next time," said Solaris, "remember? The *Medusoid* spores are still killing me slowly. I'll be dead in less than a year."

"The hell you will," said Aaron, "I'll find a cure for the poison if it's the last thing I do."

"So you can put her on trial for murder and a grand conspiracy to commit murder?" Clair asked in an outraged tone. "You do realize

that New York has the death penalty for murder."

"I'll still save her!" said Aaron, "genius such as Solaris Pretorius shouldn't be allowed to die, not if it can be helped that is."

"I don't deserve salvation," said Solaris.

"We'll be the judge of that," said Patricia.

"How pathetic," said Columbina. She then glared hatefully at Sora, "don't think this is over."

"I know," said Sora, "but it is over for now. Violet beat you!"

"She may be beyond my control," said Columbina, "her powers will fully awaken when her heart heals, but I refuse to allow that to happen! If I cannot corrupt a Princess of Heart, then I can still destroy her!"

Just then Stormy teleported in, a dark lightning spell charged in her good hand.

"Kill Violet and Jill!" Columbina shouted.

Stormy then shot the dark lightning at Violet and Jill.

But then Frankie got in front of Violet and Jill, intercepting the dark lightning. The bolt of magical electricity was then absorbed into her via her neck bolts, which sparked brightly. Instantly, Frankie felt better.

"Thanks for the recharge!" said a grinning Frankie. She then shot a bolt of her own lightning at Stormy, hitting the dark witch in the torso and sent her flying towards the rock wall. Stormy hit the wall hard, fell down and didn't get back up again.

"What in the name of Anubis was that all about!?" Cleo exclaimed.

"Columbina was controlling her!" said Klaus, while Sunny nodded in agreement, "she told us that she had two sleeper pawns."

"Did I not say that I always have contingencies?" Columbina asked.

Just then Eliza appeared out of nowhere next to Steven. She broke his arms before he could react and ran towards Violet and Jill, giggling like the out of control maniac she was. Felicia, Mark and Julia tried to stop her, but Eliza broke their limbs as well.

Kairi then tried to intercept Eliza, but the giggling lunatic grabbed Kairi before she could summon her Keyblade and threw her to the ground, then ran headlong at Violet and Jill.

But then Hezekiah threw his spear with all his might. The projectile intercepted Eliza just before she reached Violet and Jill, impaling her with enough force to carry her to the wall and pinning her to the rock surface.

Eliza gasped in shock and pain, a look of horrified clarity entering her eyes as she looked down at the spear shaft sticking out of her chest. "That's not funny," she said, spitting out blood with her words, "that's... not..." she gave off a rattling breath and died.

"Sanity in the end," said Lilith as Hezekiah retrieved his spear, "if only Eliza embraced it sooner, she might have been alright."

Sora then glared at Columbina, "any more contingences up your sleeves?"

"Not at this time," said Columbina, "however," she then grinned viciously, "I believe you'll soon have a more pressing problem to deal with, Sora."

Kairi then got up, her hand clutching her forehead, while on the ground, the memory suppression device lay in sparking pieces.

"Kairi!" Sora shouted. "Are... are you alright?"

Kairi looked at Sora and in a rush, the corrupted memories reasserted themselves. She once again saw Sora as the tentacle-creature, while Riku, Tess, Aiden, Malcolm, Roxas and Naminé were flesh-hungry zombies.

"NO!" Kairi shouted in a terrified voice, "stay away from me!" She then backed away from Sora, "leave me alone, you horrible things!"

"Oh, not again!" said Aiden, "she's gone crazy!"

"We've got to calm her down!" said Malcolm.

"Solaris!" said Riku, "don't you have another memory suppression device?"

"Not on me," said Solaris.

"Kairi!" said Frankie, "you've got to calm down!"

Kairi looked at Frankie and the curse warped her perception again. To Kairi's eyes, Frankie appeared as a lumbering brute, seven feet tall, overly muscled and emotionless eyes, her hands outstretched to destroy whatever was in her way.

Kairi then saw Draculaura as a Wamphyri, Ghoulia as a flesh-hungry zombie, Gill and Lagoon as slime-covered water creatures with yellow eyes, Toralei, Clawdeen, Clawd and Howleen as rabid werewolves and a werecat, Cleo as a rotting mummy, Abbey as a ten-foot lumbering yeti, Heath as an out of control fire spirit and Deuce as a snake-tailed creature.

"NO!" exclaimed Kairi, "leave me alone, you monsters! Leave me alone!"

"They will leave you alone!" Columbina shouted, "just trust me!" she then summoned a portal, "through here you'll find safety!"

"Don't listen to her, Kairi!" Sora shouted, "she's evil!"

"Stay away from me, you thing!" Kairi exclaimed. With that she ran into the portal, which closed up after her.

"No," said Sora in a shocked tone as he fell to his knees, "no."

"Oh yes," said Columbina, a vicious smile on her face, "she's gone and you'll never see her again."

Just then Alegra Wells, wearing a blue jacket over a green shirt, an ankle-length blue and orange skirt and black hiking boots, appeared as if stepping through an invisible door, "not if I have anything to say about it," she said irately to Columbina.

"YOU!" Tess shouted in an outraged tone. She then pulled out her razor, "I told you to leave us alone!"

"I'm sorry, Tess," said Alegra, "but I had to come. I just wish I had gotten here sooner. But I'm too late. Kairi is gone and I cannot undo it."

"Why not!?" Riku demanded, "you told us that you had your own means of time travel."

"Why can't you go back a little further and pull Kairi out of the way of Eliza?" Aiden asked, "The Doctor would have done that."

"The Doctor knows better than to try and mess with a crucial moment in history," said Alegra, "Rose Tyler learned that lesson the hard way. Regardless, I cannot alter an event that is time locked. What happened to Kairi had to happen, but she can still be saved."

"How dare you!" Columbina exclaimed, "how dare you meddle in my agenda! Who are you?!"

"I'm surprised you asked that," said Alegra, "considering you know so much about Sora and the others. I still don't know that much about you, Columbina, but I know enough to make you my new

nemesis. Whatever your plans are, I'll be there to stop them at ever turn."

"Never mind that!?" exclaimed Sora, "what about Kairi?!"

"Where is she?!" Riku asked.

"She's on a parallel Earth," said Alegra, "for the moment, she is safe. But her mind is still in a fragile state. If we do not take the proper actions immediately, she will be lost to us forever, lost in madness."

"No!" Tess shouted, "we're not playing your games any more, Alegra! We'll find Kairi without your help."

"You might just do that," said Alegra, "but you'll never lift the curse on her mind without me." She sighed with exasperated frustration, "look, there's no time for this. You can hate me all you want, but you still have to trust me if you want Kairi to be saved. Please, Tess, put aside your loathing of me for the good of your friend."

"Listen to her, Tess," said Patricia, "Alegra speaks the truth."

"Thank you," said Alegra, "how's your ankle by the way?"

"Still hurts sometimes," said Patricia, "but I'm grateful that you saved my life. How long has it been for you?"

"Almost two hundred years for me since our last encounter," said Alegra.

"What are you talking about, Patricia?" Katina asked, "who is this woman?"

"Someone whom I owe a great debt," said Patricia, "she is on the side of righteousness, despite her meddling and sometimes manipulative methods."

"It matters not," said Columbina, "Even I know not where Kairi is. She is lost forever in time and space!"

"Care to back that up?" Alegra asked, "a wager?"

"You have nothing that I want," said Columbina as she irately crossed her arms.

"Perhaps," said Alegra, "but I have the one thing that you need. The one thing in all of time and space that will grant you final victory over your enemies."

At that Columbina looked at Alegra curiously, "you mean... you have... *'it'*?"

"Yes, I have *'it'*," said Alegra, "and *'it'* shall be yours, if you win the wager."

"Name your terms then," said Columbina.

"This will be a race," said Alegra, "my forces against yours. Whomever reaches Kairi first, claims the prize, the prize being *'it'*."

"Agreed," said Columbina. She then smiled wickedly, "but be warned; should my forces reach Kairi first, I shall see to it that she is utterly and irrevocably destroyed."

"And I find her first, I shall see that she is healed in mind, body and heart," said Alegra, "and just to irritate you, I'll see to it that the bond between Sora and Kairi is made stronger than ever, so that not even you could even put a dent in it."

"Agreed," said Columbina, "first to find Kairi and either cure or destroy her wins." With that the two shook hands.

"Hang on a minute!" said Sora, "you can't gamble with Kairi's life and heart like that!"

"We just did, Sora," said Columbina, "enjoy this little game while you can, for when I gamble, I cheat, with extreme prejudice!" She then looked at Alegra, "you might as well surrender *'it'* to me, for you've already lost the wager! Kairi shall die and her final suffering shall be

legendary, even in Hell!" She then laughed wickedly as she vanished.

"Unscrupulous bitch," said Alegra. She then looked at Sora, "there's no time for you and your friends to argue with me. Kairi's very existence is now on the line. I can save her, but you must do as I say. Follow my instructions and she will be back in your arms, Sora. But you must trust me," she then held out her hand.

Sora looked at his friends. He could tell that Riku, Tess, especially Tess, and the others didn't trust Alegra as far as they could throw her. But they knew that Alegra was their best chance of finding Kairi before Columbina did, and Sora knew it too.

"I trust you," said Sora as he shook Alegra hand.

"Then let's get started," said Alegra, "there's much to do and so little time to do it in."

"Why do I feel that Sora just made a deal with the devil?" Laura asked.

"Who said that Alegra's the devil?" Jill asked.

Ghoulia then moaned something.

"You're right, Ghoulia," said Cleo, "Columbina's the devil. But who or what is Alegra?"

"I'm afraid we'll find out soon enough," said Frankie.

The end of chapter 10.

It's not over yet, fellow readers and writers, so stay tuned!

Epilog: Prelude to the Storm

Last time found our heroes and allies confronting the insidious and mysterious Columbina, whom had been manipulating Violet into corrupting her own heart. Turns out that Violet is a Princess of Heart whose powers had yet to awaken, but the whole mess from Violet's abduction to the murder of Shawn was set up to turn her into a Princess of Dark, the final act to turn her into a thing of evil would be the killing of Olaf in cold blood. Sora and the others did all that they could to prevent Violet from committing murder, but it was Jill whom Violet listened to and stepped away from the point of no return. Solaris then surprised everyone by burning Olaf alive from the inside.

Just when things were calming down, Columbina struck back by setting up a chain of events that left Kairi terrified of Sora and the others again. Columbina then opened a random portal to who knows where, which Kairi ran through much to Sora's horror. But then Alegra appeared and challenged Columbina to a race; whomever finds and either heals or destroys Kairi first wins. With no choice, Sora and the others accepted Alegra's help. 'Nuff said, on with the show!

Epilog: Prelude to the Storm

... Castle Oblivion...

"I think I'm in love," said Dio Brando. He and the other Villains had been watching events unfold in the tunnels beneath Central Park and had just witnessed Columbina send Kairi through a portal to an unknown destination.

"Yes, this Columbina is an... interesting person," said Regina.

"She's doing a much better job of making Sora suffer than you two," said Gaston to Xehanort and Maleficent.

"We have yet to enact our plans for Sora," said Xehanort, "speaking of which," he then looked at Maleficent, "what is your plan to drive Sora into the depths of despair?"

"State yours first and I shall state mine," said Maleficent.

"Fair enough," said Xehanort, "my plan involves destroying the spirit of Sora's friends one by one, beginning with Riku. I shall target his weaknesses and crush his heart, leaving him a desolate shell of a man not even fit to become a Heartless or a Nobody."

"Mind if I assist crushing him?" Dio Brando asked, "I do have a score to settle with him."

"Just leave some of his heart for me to torment," said Lady Tremaine.

"You shall have plenty to torment," said Maleficent, "my plan follows a similar line; destroy Sora's friends one by one, but my first target shall not be the strongest of Sora's friends, but the weakest."

"Malcolm," said Regina, "the boy with the mental condition."

"Those blackout episodes of his are a prime weakness to exploit," said Maleficent, "he shall be the first to fall into hopeless despair."

Just then the image on The Interocitor showing our heroes and Columbina showed Alegra arriving, then the screen went dead.

"What the...?" Dio Brando exclaimed, "now what?"

"A malfunction?" Sephiroth asked.

"It had better not be," said an irate Xehanort as he stood up, "The Interocitor has 2,486 parts," he then walked over to the machine, "and each one is nearly impossible to replace."

"Check the Intensifier Disk," said Insano.

"I'm doing that right now," said Xehanort as he rotated the multi-colored disk 18° to the left. Yet the screen remained blank.

"How irritating," said Xehanort, "now I shall have to check the entire contraption for a fault."

"Save your energy," said Regina, "even a novice in the mystic arts can tell that the image is being blocked."

"That woman," said Maleficent, "Alegra Wells, she is preventing us from observing."

"Then let's kill her!" said Dio Brando.

"She is immortal," said Sephiroth, "you would just be a minor irritation to her."

"Then what now?" Dio Brando asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Lady Tremaine asked, "we find Kairi before Sora and his ilk do."

"They shall surely devote all their efforts in finding her," said Xehanort.

"But we shall find her fist," said Maleficent, "and make her suffer even more before Sora's eyes."

"While tormenting Riku and Malcolm," said Xehanort.

"Of course," said Maleficent, "of course."

... **Hogwarts...**

"That's not fair," said Jill after she watched the other Violet cast aside the revolver and refuse to kill Olaf, falling into the arms of the other Jill, "it's not fair what happened to her."

"Violet had been through too much," said Andrew, "she's suffered and lost so much, it's a miracle she held on to her sanity."

"At least she's held on to her heart, broken as it is now," said Aaron.

"The other Jill will help her," said Hermione, "our Jill helped our Violet."

"Our Violet never lost her one true love," said Leon.

"Speaking of true loves," said Ron, "where have Violet and Shawn been?"

"The same place our John and Rebecca went," said Max, "back to Washington. The Bureau wanted a full report from Shawn and Violet, while John and Rebecca reported back to the American Magic Administration. Last I heard, Secretary General of Magic Byalistok was curious about their past lives."

"I've got a feeling we haven't heard the last of that mess," said Ron.

They then saw on the viewer Stormy's attack, followed by Eliza and her death.

"Oh hell!" exclaimed Aaron, "that maniac destroyed the memory suppression device on Kairi."

"So that's what that Muggle machine on her head was," said Draco, "I thought it was some weird fad."

"If you've got nothing intelligent to say, Mr. Malfoy," said an annoyed Aaron, "I suggest you keep your mouth shut! This is deadly serious business! As soon as Kairi sees Sora, she'll freak out again!"

Sure enough, they saw Kairi recoil in terror from Sora, Riku and the others, then fleeing from Frankie and the other Monsters.

"At this rate, she'll fear and hate everyone she comes across," said Aaron.

They then saw Columbina summon a portal and Kairi ran into it.

"Oh, not again!" said an outraged Ginny, "that horrible woman! I'll tear out her eyes and make her eat them!"

They all then saw Alegra appear, then the image turned to static.

"What the... !?" exclaimed Ashley, "now what?" she and Andrew walked up to the dimensional imaging device, "of all the times for it to break!"

"It's not broken," said Andrew, "at least there's no mechanical fault."

"That woman," said Harry, "the one who just appeared, she had something to do with it."

"Or maybe it's just incompetent Muggle technology," said Draco.

"Malfoy, if you do not shut your blasted gib, I'll cut your tongue out!" Jill shouted. She then looked at Harry, "what do you mean?"

"It can't be a coincidence that she showed up and the image went dead," said Harry.

"But now what?" Ron asked.

"Now," said Ashley, "we get to work on working around whatever is interfering with our viewings. We can't do anything else to help Sora and the others if we can't see what's going on."

Just then Albus ran into the room, "Dad! Mum!" he shouted as he held up a letter, "an express owl just delivered this! It's from Victoire and Teddy!"

"Enjoying their honeymoon no less," said Ron as Harry and Ginny read the letter.

"No, they're not," said Ginny, "they've been summoned to Radiant Garden."

"Some kind of big meeting involving all the Princesses and Heroes of The Realms of Light," said Harry.

"Sora and the others didn't say anything about a big meeting in their dimension," said Andrew.

"Which means one of two things," said Ashley, "either they forgot to tell us, or they didn't know."

"I've got a feeling that Sora and the others are in more trouble than they realize," said Harry.

"There are times when I hate it when you're right," said Ginny.

"Me too," said Harry.

... Radiant Garden... The Castle...

"It looks great," said King Mickey as he looked at an enormous room that had a large square ten-sided table with a built-in hologram projector in the middle. The chairs were simple brown wood with white cushions, each chair enchanted to fit the height and weight of its occupier. The room was well lit with soft white chandeliers in the ceiling and wall lanterns, while to one side of the room were several smaller tables that would be loaded with drinks and snacks for the meeting. The other side of the room opened to a wide balcony with a pristine view of the city.

"You've all done a hot dog job here," said King Mickey to Leon, Aerith, Yuffie and Cid.

"Just wanted our visiting friends to feel comfortable," said Yuffie.

"Not too comfortable, though," said Aerith, "we want them all to focus on the meeting."

"I'm just worried about where everyone's gonna stay for the meeting," said Cid, "there aren't that many inns and hotels in town."

"That's why we're renovating the castle guest rooms," said Leon, "our friends won't be sleeping in luxury, but their rooms won't be Spartan either."

Just then Donald and Goofy ran into the room, each of them carrying several scrolls, "your majesty!" Goofy shouted, "we got a response!"

"A whole lot of RSVP's just arrived!" said Donald. He and Goofy then handed the scrolls to King Mickey.

"Snow White, Aurora, Cinderella, Aladdin and Jasmine," said King Mickey as he looked at the responses, "Tarzan, Mulan, Ariel and her family, Hercules, Alice, Belle and Beast, Jack Skellington, Jack Sparrow, Violet Parr, Sara Lancaster and Ranma, Lyra and Will, Nessie and Jacob, Victoire and Teddy, and even Hayner, Pence and Olette."

The King then looked at two scrolls, "these are from Usagi and Miley. They're not coming."

"Why ever not?" Queen Minnie as she and Daisy walked in.

"Miley says she's going through a really tough time," said King Mickey, "her career, school and... oh no, she's broken up with Jake!"

"What!?" exclaimed Yuffie, Aerith, Queen Minnie and Daisy.

"That's what's in the letter," said King Mickey as he handed the scroll to Queen Minnie, "it didn't say what happened, just that she and Jake aren't together any more."

"I can't imagine what happened," said Daisy, "those two were so in love with each other."

"Whatever happened," said King Mickey, "I'm sure she'll tell us when she's ready."

"So, she's not coming," said Yuffie, "okay, but what about Usagi? Don't tell me she and Mamoru broke up too."

"No," said King Mickey as he handed the scroll to Yuffie, "but they and the rest of the Sailor Senshi have decided to sit this one out, and frankly, I don't blame them."

"They saved their world six times in two years," said Queen Minnie, "add saving The Realms of Light, I completely understand if they wish for a long rest."

"Okay, that's two who isn't coming," said Yuffie, "anyone else?"

"We haven't heard from Simba or Peter Pan," said King Mickey.

"Maybe their invitations got lost," said Daisy.

"Who knows what happened?" King Mickey asked, "but a lot of friends are coming. With any luck, we'll figure out what to do about Maleficent and Xehanort. Now," he then walked out onto the balcony, "if only Sora and the others can stay out of trouble until they get back."

"An impossible wish if I ever heard one," said Cid.

"Well, I had to try," said King Mickey.

... Somewhere Else...

Kairi found herself in the middle of a vast forest. She had no idea where she was or how she had come there, only that the terrible creatures that had been pursuing her were gone. Still, she was alive, in relatively good health.

Over the sounds of the forest, Kairi faintly heard running water. She soon found a small stream. The water was cool and inviting. She knelt down and drank, finding it sweet and clean.

Her thirst sated, Kairi sat up and looked around. Across the stream was a moss-covered stature that had two opposing faces. It looked to be a marker statue of some kind. Kairi then saw an identical marker statue further up the stream, then another down the stream.

Kairi then felt something calling to her, some unknown force drawing her to cross the stream. Confused, not knowing where this feeling was coming from or what it wanted with her, Kairi crossed the stream on a path of stepping stones. She felt a brief sensation of resistance in the air, then it passed. It was as if she had passed through a barrier.

For some reason, Kairi felt more at ease, as if a weight had been relieved from her shoulders and heart. She then felt the drawing sensation was stronger. Not knowing what else to do, she followed the pull of whatever it was that was calling to her. She moved on to whatever the future had in store for her.

... Somewhere Else...

On the far side of The Realms of Light lay a world with a bright sun. This world, The Kingdom of Corona, had a princess, Rapunzel, whom had a very complicated childhood. In short, Rapunzel was abducted from her rightful parents, the king and queen of Corona, by a dark witch obsessed with immortality, since Rapunzel was born with a magical power of healing.

Needless to say, the witch kept Rapunzel locked away from the world for 18 years, always keeping her close by and never allowing Rapunzel to cut her ever increasing golden blond hair, for that hair was the outlet for her healing power.

One thing led to another, resulting in Rapunzel leaving her tower home to discover the truth of her existence. She learned of her true identity, fell in love with a thief and freed herself from her false mother's control, while at the same time cutting her hair, turning it

brown and losing her healing power, while the false mother was destroyed.

As true love often flows, Rapunzel and her soul mate, Eugene Fitzgerbert, otherwise known as the rogue Flynn Rider, married, with their wedding turning out to be an event that the kingdom would be hard to forget, in more ways than one.

On the edge of the kingdom capital, two horses and their riders walked down a tree-lined road, both with heavily packed saddle bags. One of these horses was a brown-coated mare with a brown mane. Atop this horse sat a girl, about 19 with short brown hair, green eyes and wore a lavender and white dress. Her feet were bare. Atop her shoulder was a small green chameleon. This girl was Rapunzel.

The second horse, a white-coated stallion with a yellow mane, had a man in his early 20's in her saddle. He was tall with brown hair, brown eyes and a short beard. He wore a white shirt with a blue vest and tan trousers and brown boots. This was Eugene, husband to Rapunzel.

"Exactly where are we going for our honeymoon, Eugene?" Rapunzel asked.

"Someplace fantastic," said Eugene, "something beyond anything any of us could have dreamed of; a resort spa on another world."

"I read about other worlds," said Rapunzel, "but I always thought they were just stories." She looked up at the sky, which was darkening towards night. Already a few stars could be seen. "Who would have thought that our world wasn't the only in the universe?" She then looked the chameleon on her shoulder, "what do you think, Pascal? Are there people out there like us?"

At that the chameleon, Pascal, shrugged its tiny shoulders.

"Hey, Blondie," said Eugene, "people are people all over, no matter what they look like. Take it from me, I know."

"Oh?" Rapunzel asked as she looked her husband with mischievous eyes, "and you'd know that from your exploits?"

"Well, more or less," said Eugene, "if anything, there's good and bad out there, just like on our world."

At that Rapunzel looked like she was remembering something uncomfortable.

"Oh, sorry," said Eugene, "I shouldn't have..."

"No, it's alright," said Rapunzel, "I... I'm alright. That horrible woman is gone and she can't hurt or lie to me any more."

"And I'll be here make sure nothing ever hurts you again," said Eugene, "thanks to those fantastic eyes of yours."

"I still don't know how it happened," said Rapunzel, "you cut my hair," she then touched her brown locks, "my power should have been gone for good, but my tears healed you. I guess love is the most powerful magic there is."

She then glared at Eugene, "but it would have saved me a lot of heartache if you waited for me to heal you, then cut my hair."

"Hey, I was dieing," said Eugene, "I wasn't thinking right. But even if I wasn't, I would have done the same thing."

"And I'm glad you did," said Rapunzel. She and Eugene then kissed.

At that the horse Eugene was riding gave a snort of annoyance, as if saying 'oh get a room.'

"Hey, we're married now, Maximus," said Eugene, "can you blame us for not getting enough of each other?"

"You'd feel better if you had a girlfriend, Maximus," said Rapunzel. She then patted the neck of her mare, "take Desiree, she's single, and beautiful, for a horse."

At that the mere, Desiree, whickered with pleasure at the compliment.

"We'll have plenty of time to ourselves when we get there," said Eugene.

"And are you going to enlighten your new wife as to where we are going?" Rapunzel asked, "and how did you arrange a honeymoon on another world?"

"I have a friend of a friend of a friend who owed me a favor," said Eugene, "I helped him out of a tight jam."

At that Maximus snorted again, as if saying 'you mean, you stole something for him.'

"Okay, I did steal something for him," said Eugene, "but it was for a good reason."

"Just how much have you stolen, anyway?" Rapunzel asked.

"Not enough to have gotten me my own kingdom before," said Eugene, "for which I'm glad. Otherwise, I wouldn't have tried to steal that tiara," he then smiled at Rapunzel, "then I would never have met you. Out of all the things I've stolen, the one thing I'm glad to have taken is your heart."

"Gee," said Rapunzel, "and here I thought I stole yours." With that they kissed again.

"So," said Rapunzel afterwards, "you still haven't told me what we're about to get into?"

"I was hoping to make it a surprise," said Eugene, "but what the heck! Okay, ever hear of a bathhouse?"

"I think so," said Rapunzel, "it was in one of my books. Some cultures practice bathing by scrubbing and cleaning first, *then* soaking in the tub. It's supposed to be very relaxing."

"We're going to find out," said Eugene, "now," he then pulled out a small scroll of parchment, as well as two silver tickets, "we should be at the rendezvous point by now, all we have to do is wait."

"For what?" Rapunzel asked. Just then a portal opened in front of them, startling the horses somewhat.

"For that," said Eugene. "It's perfectly safe, or so my friend of a friend of a friend told me."

"Uh, yeah," said Rapunzel. She then checked her saddlebag and brought out a cast iron frying pan, "just in case."

"I'd feel utterly unsafe without it," said Eugene. He then held his hand out in a welcoming gesture, "ladies first!"

"Why thank you, kind sir," said Rapunzel as she put the frying pan back into her saddlebag. With that she took Eugene's hand and the two of them rode into the portal.

... Somewhere Else...

On a parallel Earth in a parallel village in a parallel Japan, a young girl lay in her bed, troubled by disturbing dreams. The girl was about fifteen with long brown hair, brown eyes. Her name is Ognio Chihiro. She thrashed about in bed, her brow wet with sweat as her unconscious mind experienced things beyond her understanding.

With a start, Chihiro woke up from her dreams, gasping for breath as reality returned to her. She looked around her room. A typical room for a Japanese girl just starting high school. She had her own computer and T.V. set and the latest model of cell phone and MP3 player. One wall of her room was decorated with movie and pop star

posters, while the opposite wall was a trophy case full of medals and awards from martial arts competitions.

Chihiro got out of bed and looked at herself in a mirror, seeing her face and body, a body conditioned by years of karate training.

She tried to remember her dreams; faces of people she had never seen before, of strange creatures beyond anything she had experienced, and she had experienced strange things before.

Chihiro went to her window and looked out towards a nearby forested mountain where, five years ago, she underwent an adventure beyond dreams.

"Haku," Chihiro said aloud, "are you there? Are you still watching over me? Do you even remember me?"

... Somewhere Else...

On a different parallel Earth, on the streets of a parallel Tokyo, 14 year old Yurameshi Yusuke walked with his hands in his pockets, just going about his business. Yusuke wore a green middle school uniform in defiance of his school's blue uniforms. He was tall with brown eyes and black hair with a short bangs over his forehead.

To most of the world, Yusuke had made himself out to be the toughest, meanest, strongest juvenile delinquent in the country, earning a reputation as a fierce and invincible street fighter and a terror among those of his generation, not to mention earning the ire of his teachers.

But Yusuke didn't care what others thought of him, he just wanted to do his own thing. Yet despite his monstrous reputation, he still had some goodness in his heart. This was fortunate because had Yusuke been all bad inside and out, he would have been thrown into hell.

Not too long ago, Yusuke had suffered a near death experience while pushing a child out of the way of a reckless driver. Yusuke's soul was separated from his body and was taken to the afterlife. The powers that be declared that Yusuke's act of selflessness earned him a second chance at life, while also allowing him to tap into powers beyond his understanding, yet he soon understood those powers and used them to fight the forces of darkness, encountering bizarre friends and making even more bizarre enemies.

Yet despite all his trials and tribulations, Yusuke was a good person willing to do the right thing. He won't like doing it, most of the time he'd rather do something else, but he was ready to do what had to be done, and pretty soon, he'd have to do just that once again, and he wouldn't do it alone.

... Somewhere Else...

On another parallel Earth, a man on a motorcycle stylized after a grasshopper, rode through the streets of Tokyo. This man, Minami Kotaro, was one of many unsung heroes whom gave his all in the never ending war against the darkness. Unknown to Kotaro, he will soon be drawn into that conflict yet again.

... In A Dark Place...

Far underground, far from any natural light source, Five wicked individuals met to plan something foul. These people were all cloaked and their faces couldn't be seen, but their height and build set them apart.

Three of the individuals wore white cloaks while the fourth wore black. The first in white was a tall, heavily built male, the second a short male. The third was a woman, as was the one in black. The fifth individual wore a gray cloak and was of indeterminable gender.

"Why is it that we must meet here?" the woman in black asked irately, "underground is so... dirty."

"That's what you get when you're underground," said the short man, "dirt."

At that the woman in white laughed, "you'd rather we meet in a hotel? Or rather in the resort above?"

"I just wish our contact would be more forthcoming with our instructions," said the woman in black, "patience is one of my stronger virtues, but I can wait only so long."

"Our benefactors will be here when they will be here," said the tall, heavy man, "no sooner or later."

"Well, here's hoping it's sooner," said the woman in black, "I'm not getting any younger, you know."

"We know," said the one in the gray cloak in a raspy voice.

Just then a Dark Corridor opened up and from it, walked Brother Courtney and The Lord of Illusions.

"Ah," said Brother Courtney as he took in the surroundings, "we're all here, I see."

"Punctual, that's good," said The Lord of Illusions, "but this setting, this cavern, who's idea was it to meet underground?"

"Not ours," said the short man.

"We had our own underground complex before," said the white-cloaked woman, "but this is far too simple."

"Then permit me to make us more... comfortable," said The Lord of Illusions.

The seven dark individuals then found themselves in a lavish desert tent near an oasis. A rug covered by overstuffed pillows lay at their feet, while scantily clad serving girls in silks giggled as they moved about with food and drink.

The five cloaked individuals could now be seen more clearly. The tall man had a gray, stone-like mask and gray, clawed hands. The short man had a green face and skin, while the white-cloaked woman's face was black and white with a film-like mask covering it. The woman in black had her hood up, covering her face, while the one with the gray cloak was a humanoid demon made apparently of solidified fog.

"Please, sit down," said the gaudily dressed trickster as he sat on the pillows. A trio of serving girls brought over a selection of snacks and wine, "one of my more... sensual scenarios," he then light swatted the behind of one of the serving girls, whom giggled and looked at him slyly. He winked at her, with a promise of a more intimate visit later.

"Even my brotherhood," said Brother Courtney as he sat down, "The Enigma Order, we do enjoy the finer things in life, in moderation of course." He then selected a glass of wine from one of the serving girls and used it to toast the cloaked individuals.

"And what of your true masters?" the tall man with the gray face asked, "what of Dai-Shocker?"

"What indeed of Dai-Shocker, High Priest Darom?" Brother Courtney asked. He then looked at the short man with the green face, "High Priest Baraom?" then the white-cloaked woman with the mixed face, "High Priestess Bishium? What do you suppose Dai-Shocker wants with The Three High Priests of Gorgom?"

Brother Courtney then looked at the fog-like demon, "And what of your fellow comrades, Shadowcast?"

"And what of you?" The Lord of Illusions asked the black-cloaked woman, "what's your say in all of this?"

"Power," said the fog-like demon, Shadowcast.

"Revenge," said the black-cloaked woman, "and power."

"We are merely in this for power," said High Priest Baraom.

"Revenge would be a more... secondary goal," said High Priestess Bishium.

"But power to rebuild Gorgom," said High Priest Darom, "power to raise a new Creation King and begin another 50,000 year cycle, to dominate our world in darkness, yes, we would gladly ally ourselves with Dai-Shocker."

"Considering that none of you would even been here if it weren't for Dai-Shocker," said The Lord of Illusions, "their power of resurrection over those with dark hearts is most impressive. So many fallen villains, brought back again and again to spread more and more evil."

"A pity that they haven't had more success," said the black-cloaked woman, "now, why would that be? Oh, now I remember; those disgusting Kamen Riders."

"The foolish heroes will be dealt with in time," said Brother Courtney, "when we are ready. Dai-Shocker has plenty of irons in the fire, irons that will bear fruit in due course. This time around, prudence and caution will be our strongest weapons. This time, not even Decade and all the Riders combined, not even the new ones, Double and O's, will be able to stop us."

"Assuming the plan works," said High Priest Darom.

"We've been following your instructions," said High Priest Baraom, "but to what end?"

"We are merely all cogs in the great machine that is Dai-Shocker," said Brother Courtney, "individually we are relatively unimportant. But together, we create something greater than the sum of the parts."

"In other words," said the black-cloaked woman, "our efforts will bear fruit, but not immediately."

"Oh, there will be a short term harvest," said Brother Courtney in a reassuring tone, "you, my dear woman shall have your revenge and your greatest wish granted. As for the three High Priests, they shall have what they want; a revived Gorgom and a new Creation King, and revenge on the man who brought it all down before."

"Minami Kotaro!" snapped High Priestess Bishium, "Black Sun! He shall pay for his transgressions against Gorgom!"

"All shall pay who crossed Dai-Shocker," said Brother Courtney.

"In that case," said The Lord of Illusions as he signaled to the serving girls. They brought over crystal goblets and presented them to the three High Priests and to the cloaked woman, "I believe a toast is in order."

"That is... reasonable," said High Priest Baraom as he and the other High Priests took their goblets, which the serving girls then filled with blood-red wine.

"I'm never much of a drinker," said the black-cloaked woman, "but, I'll indulge myself this one time." She then took the goblet and it was filled with wine. She then looked at Shadowcast, "you don't say much, do you."

"No," said Shadowcast.

"Well, excuse me for trying to be sociable," said the black-cloaked woman.

"You never did give us your name," said High Priestess Bishium.

"No I did not," said the black-cloaked woman.

"Ah, a girl of mystery," said Brother Courtney, "I like that."

"Thanks, big boy," said the black-cloaked woman, "just remember to keep your hands to yourself, if you enjoy having two hands."

"Feisty, I like that too!" said Brother Courtney.

"My fellow dark hearts!" said The Lord of Illusions as he stood up, as did the others, "a toast, to the glory and triumph of Dai-Shocker!"

"To the glory and triumph of Dai-Shocker!" said all the assembled villains as they raised their glasses and drank the wine.

To be continued in Volume 6.

And that's it for this story, fellow readers and writers. I hope you enjoyed Volume 5 as much as I did creating it. But don't panic, our heroes and allies will be back soon, as well as new friends and villains, for next time, we'll be diving into the realms of Spirited Away, Tangled, Yu Yu Hakusho and Kamen Rider Black, as well as guest stars from Harry Potter, Monster High and even My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic. What an undertaking it will be.

Coming soon...

Kingdom Hearts: Path of the Keyblade Master

Volume 6: The Great Bathhouse Battle

See you then!